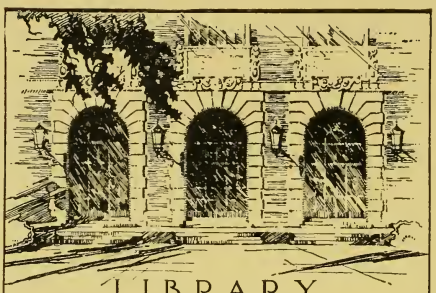
MRS. SEVERN

MARY E. CARTER



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MRS. SEVERN

MRS. SEVERN. A NOVEL BY MARY E. CARTER, AUTHOR OF 'JULIET'

'SIN COMES TO US FIRST AS A *TRAVELLER;* IF ADMITTED, IT WILL SOON BECOME A *GUEST;* IMPORTUNATE TO RESIDE, AND IF ALLOWED SO FAR, WILL SOON AND FINALLY BECOME *MASTER* OF THE HOUSE'

IN THREE VOLUMES
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MRS. SEVERN

PART II—*Continued*

CHAPTER IX

MRS. SEVERN SHOWS EMOTION

Mrs. Severn knew the exact point in the woods where Anna would be likely to come in sight of her, and at that point she turned again and began leisurely walking back. Anna was a quick walker, and having stayed so long at the Hall would not be likely to loiter on her way home. If she saw her walking from her she might think she had been a greater distance, whereas, if she were coming from Old Lafer, she would be sure she had just come out.

She had been loitering here all the afternoon. It had, as Danby concluded, struck her that they might all come to the stile together, and her longing to catch a glimpse of him was overmastering. If only she could see him once, she would know how he looked and be able to recognise him again instantly. An almost delirious excitement was upon her. She was feeling the old craving, but knew that upon her power to subdue it depended Anna's visit to Rocozanne. And nothing could have agreed so fully with her hopes and plans as this probability of her absence. To be without Anna would be freedom and power. The fact that Anna had to watch her on one score always gave her the feeling that she was being watched on all. If Anna knew how eager she was that she should go, she would probably become suspicious and stay at home. Whereas she had lately succeeded in disarming suspicion.

This she had accomplished deliberately. Her pondering nature was capable of evolving self-interested measures and of unwearying patience in carrying them through. Since the announcement by her husband of Cynthia's engagement—an announcement that had been forestalled by Mrs. Hennifer—the whole power of her mind had been bent on the hope of seeing Danby again. She had loved Danby as passionately as it was possible for her to love any one. Had he been so near that she might have summoned him to her side, she would never have broken faith with him when Mr. Severn proposed. When she heard that he was to be so near again, and in such happy and fortunate circumstances, she was first bewildered, then roused and maddened. Not only did she feel the revival of passion, but she was also alarmed. She did not love her husband, but she could not fail to respect him. If he knew all she must inevitably fall in his estimation. The affec-

tion that had been lavished on her and carelessly received now, for the first time, became of value. Her first idea in planning to see Danby had been to implore him not to betray her. But when Mrs. Hennifer piqued her by assuring her no one but Miss Marlowe herself need know, and that from Danby, she lost her fear, again disdained her husband and began to dwell upon the possibility of commanding Danby's attention in some degree to herself. She scarcely knew as yet that evil passion was at work in her, and how little she was to be trusted to discretion if she saw him. The one point that troubled her was as to whether she would recognise him. In all probability he was greatly changed. It was more likely that he would know her. Years sat lightly upon her. Sorrow she had not known. She was well preserved, handsomer than as a girl, but unaltered in any vital degree. Of course, if they met, nothing would be more natural

than that she should stop him. No remark would be caused, since her secret, *their* secret, would be unknown. As Miss Marlowe's agent's wife, he would have been introduced at Old Lafer by Miss Marlowe. Every one knew she was of superior birth and education to her husband, and there would be no hint of affability on his part or incongruity on hers, in their stopping to speak in Wonston or on the road.

With this end in view she rearranged her daily life. Borlase had ordered her to take exercise and be as much as possible in the fresh air after the weakness that followed her last visit to the Mires, and the faint that was unaccountable to all but Mrs. Hennifer, though without any expectation that his orders would be complied with. It was therefore graceful to show herself compliant. Mr. Severn and Anna were delighted to forward every wish she expressed to go into Wonston; to visit more and to walk in the

lanes and woods and on the moors. Mrs. Hennifer, however, casually hearing of all this, made some sarcastic remark upon the ease with which it was possible for some people suddenly to acquire locomotive power, and smiled grimly.

But all was useless. Though Danby was constantly either at the 'Marlowe Arms' in Wonston or at the Hall, she never—so far as she knew—met or saw him before the Admiral's death. She had tried to persuade Mrs. Hennifer to describe him; she had asked her husband what this future master was like; she had suggested to Anna that Miss Marlowe might show her his photograph, but nothing seemed possible. At last came the day of Admiral Marlowe's death when she overheard Mr. Severn and Anna discussing the mortal illness of some person, and was seized by the frightful terror that it was him —Lucius. The fear, and its revulsion of intense relief; her horror of death, however

remote; the weird and silent gathering of the snowstorm during which she always felt that Old Lafer was indeed at world's end, a place of ghosts and bogies and nightmares; the absence of Mr. Severn and Anna; her dispute with the children, and Emmeline's senseless panic, all worked upon her with a sense of abandonment and maddening arbitrary fate. She fell, and at last her husband knew it. The pitying recoiling condemnation with which he afterwards treated her; his rapid ageing and unvarying sombreness, made her reckless. She found herself hating him, and threw all restraining influences to the winds. Thenceforth, thought of Lucius Danby overwhelmed every other.

During Danby's visits before the wedding, she again made every effort to see him. It seemed that it would be impossible to miss him now, when he always stayed in Wonston. When she went into Wonston she generally made some excuse for going the longer way,

turning into the lanes at East Lafer and crossing the old bridge, from whence she was on the road he must traverse. But again she never had the slightest success.

She was now so goaded by failure that desperation seized her. The wedding was drawing near. It was certain Danby had never made the slightest effort to see her. Mrs. Hennifer distinctly told her that he was warmly devoted to Cynthia and that his old affection was utterly extinct. As she realised that this must be true she became at once more daring and more reckless. Excitement and thwarted desires preyed upon her. She rebelled against her helplessness. Her fever of mind once more renewed the now well-known craving. She must quench it. She went too far and was discovered by Anna. Then Cynthia was married. She heard of the long honeymoon that was arranged, and resigned herself to a long quiescence which, compared to her former state of unrest and

self-indulgence, really resembled coma, but appeared to Anna an effort at self-control that would succeed. It was however far from being that. Borlase had told her that she was on the high road to self-destruction. No constitution, however good, could long withstand the continued action of alcohol. She must either restrain herself or sacrifice her life.

She had not the slightest intention of sacrificing her life. She had a truly cowardly fear of death, and shrank from the unknown as more likely to contain misery than happiness. Compared to that she was very comfortable at Old Lafer. Besides which it was possible that matters might brighten. At least there was the certainty that if Mr. and Mrs. Danby-Marlowe returned in safety from their honeymoon they would settle at the Hall, and she would be secure in the certainty of his proximity. Surely he would then show at least curiosity to see her.

Thus Cynthia's object in proposing and carrying out so long a journey in a great measure defeated itself. Mrs. Severn would have been more likely to fatally injure her health had they remained at home. As it was she had time to recruit. This steadied her nerves. She was conscious now of greater powers of self-control, and had lost that overwrought condition of nervousness which had gained upon her from the time of Mrs. Hennifer's first disclosure, without her ever having had leisure from anxiety and expectation, in which to rally.

She was now looking remarkably well and knew it. A careful investigation of herself in the mirror before she came out to-day had assured her of the fact. She arranged her lace bonnet with its usual effective negligence, and carried a scarlet parasol. The wood was shady, of course, and the parasol was not necessary, but she opened it and held it behind her head, which it set off most strik-

ingly. She had studied this too before the mirror. She was naturally a great contrast to Cynthia, and therefore had no fear of a possible comparison with her. Then she walked up and down the path which favoured the object of these manœuvres by running in almost a straight line for some distance from the stile.

She had been there fully an hour before the trio arrived. The longer they delayed the more certain she was that they would all come eventually. After tea such a stroll would just nicely fill up the time before dressing for dinner. But she was greatly startled when at last she saw the end of the vista occupied. The figures were silhouetted against the open sunlight on the park. Cynthia and Anna were standing sideways in the open. Danby had put a foot upon a rail in the fence, and was facing her as he lit a cigarette. His eyes were dropped, fixed on the spark. But she had not time to turn

before he threw away the lucifer, and straightening himself, looked up. Their eyes met.

Mrs. Severn instantly wheeled round, and for a few moments afterwards walked as she had never walked in her life. Her heart was beating as though it would burst. She was at fever-heat. Her eyes were blinded. Intense excitement overpowered her instinctive desire to walk slowly, to put down her parasol, to prove herself as cold as he, and a married woman of a dignity that might be insidious, but was fascinating. She could not command herself. She had passed beyond her own rule. Her one thought was, 'He has seen me.' She was sure she would know him again from his clothes. She had not been able to distinguish his face sufficiently to compare it with her own knowledge of him. It was much more probable that he had distinguished her. The level shade of the wood would ensure that, even from a distance. He had been scarcely more than

a figure to her. But the clothes were unmistakable. It was curious how greatly she was impressed by the simple shooting suit that stamped him as a country gentleman. There flashed into her mind a picture of him as public-spirited, and taking up all the interests of the life. He would be sworn in on the Liberty Bench; become Chairman of the Board of Guardians, President of Agricultural Societies, a man of Committees and Meetings, an influence on local Boards, a voice in the County. All this and more the Admiral had been. She knew Cynthia had ideas of Reform and Philanthropy. They would have mutual interests. He would not lead an idle life. He would be alert, occupied, interested. This was the clearest intuitive conviction of which Mrs. Severn had ever been conscious. Something in the straightening of his figure had inspired it. Her heart sank. Somehow it seemed to remove him again from her reach. She had

an indefinite idea that the man of no resources, of no occupation, might easily have fallen into a false excitement such as she was now feeling. But where employment in the form of work was mixed with that of sport and visiting, such a possibility was much more remote.

In this way, urged by the scorching in her face, and the impetus of confused and conflicting feeling, she quickly vanished over the ridge into the deep hollow of which Cynthia spoke in her description of the wood to Danby. She went down the hill as quickly, but, having nearly fallen, through stumbling and catching her foot in the root of a larch that sprawled across the path like a bent tendon, she compelled herself to be more careful. Then she remembered to retrace her steps with the intention of meeting Anna. Had she begun to ascend the other side of the hollow, it would have been too late for this manœuvre, for it might have

struck Anna that she had not seen her approaching, as would naturally have been the case, since the two sides were of equal height. Half-way up, she paused for the sake of steadying her nerves again. Any flush would be easily accounted for by the ascent. But she must have her wits about her.

While standing she heard Anna's footsteps gradually coming nearer, and in a few moments she appeared, tripping lightly over the ridge. She exclaimed when she saw her, and hastened, finally passing her at a run whose clear aim defied such obstacles as roots, and landed her laughing and breathless in the hollow, whence she looked back gaily and waved her hand.

Mrs. Severn cautiously followed.

There was a flush on her face and her eyes were radiant and luminous. Anna, looking up at her, thought she had never seen her look so beautiful. It startled her,

she had never seen her look like this. Mere handsomeness—which is often animal—had gone. She seemed suddenly to prove the existence of a soul within herself. Her face had gained feeling. Her eyes seemed to have opened wide and to look upon a different prospect from that to which they had long been accustomed. She looked sentient, vital, a creature of emotions and impulses.

'What has happened?' said Anna involuntarily.

The attempt at disguise instantly deserted Mrs. Severn. She did not realise how completely she had worn her heart in her face, and forgot discretion.

She laughed. It was quite a girlish laugh, and Anna was still more astonished. This was very different from the old, well-known, slow smile.

'What is the matter, Clothilde?' she said.

But Mrs. Severn had recovered herself.

'Matter? Nothing. I nearly fell, caught in a root as I came down.'

'Up, you mean,' said Anna. 'How awkward; and how good of you to come and meet me, dear. Take my arm and I'll help you up this side. Then we'll rest at the top. Yes, I've had a very happy day, and they set me to the stile. What a pity you hadn't got so far.'

Mrs. Severn did not answer. They were going up-hill.

CHAPTER X

'SIN THE MASTER'

'And how is Mrs. Danby?' said Mrs. Severn, when they had rested a moment and started again. She had not dared to ask while they were standing, lest Anna should study her face. But this was the best opportunity she was likely to have for hearing all she wanted to know.

'Radiant!' said Anna. 'Geoff did not say one word too much last night, in fact not nearly plenty. She is lovely. When she goes out she will take society by storm. She has promised that I shall see her dressed for her first ball. And she will be presented

next season. She is wonderfully changed, and yet under it all sorts of little familiarities show themselves. And she's beautiful, and just as sweet and bright and good as ever.'

'"A phantom of delight," apparently.'

'Yes, "a phantom of delight," and still anything but a phantom really, for she shows her warmheartedness in everything.'

'And of course you think she's happy?'

'Think! Think indeed! Why, Clothilde, "who runs may read." If you saw her you would know it as clearly as I do. But you will see her. You will have to make a formal call.'

'Did she speak of coming here?'

'No. It was not likely before you had done your duty. You must go, you know.'

'Yes, I know. I'll wait till you are gone to Rocozanne, it will be something to think of and do then.'

'She sent her kind regards to you.'

'Her *kind regards to me?*'

'Yes. Why not? She never sends you her love. You and she don't know each other as she and I do.'

'Oh, it was not that,' said Mrs. Severn, with a slight shrug of her shoulders; 'I only wondered she thought of me at all. In her letters I was always conspicuous by the absence of any allusion.'

'I am sure, dear, she never thought you would feel it or care, or she would have put you in with Dad as a matter of course.'

'Would she? I don't think so. I have always felt she did not like me. The Admiral admired me too much, but she need not have been jealous when we are such contrasts. I can understand two dark and two fair women being jealous of each other, when they are both handsome. She might have considered he would probably admire her all the more with me as a foil.'

Anna laughed. The humour of this was irresistible.

'Do you really think either she or the dear old Admiral ever thought seriously about it, Clothilde?' she said. 'And she's the last woman in the world to be jealous. You are too sensitive. You think too much of little forgetfulnesses. But when you call, you'll find how pleasant Cynthia is. It seems to me she thinks a great deal about us, and is interested in everything. She actually began to talk to me to-day about the time before you were married, and if I remembered our crossings, especially the last one or the one before. She knew I was going to Rocozanne next month, so that put it into her mind, I suppose, especially as Mr. Danby proposed to her at St. Helier's. And she remembered more clearly than I did, and said I was confused. She seemed really as though she cared to talk about it.'

During this speech Mrs. Severn was thankful indeed for the precaution she had taken not to be face to face with Anna dur-

ing her catechising. Nothing could have astounded her more. It was precisely what she had persuaded herself would never happen. She had flattered herself that Cynthia's pride had been so wounded that she detested her, and her love so jealous that she was determined not only to hold aloof herself, but to guard against Danby seeing her. Of course she had not allowed Mrs. Hennifer to tell Anna such derogatory facts. She had been more flattered than displeased by the omission of her name from her letters; it all proved that she wished to efface her, that she feared her. And now, just when she felt herself mistress of the move, she was checkmated. Evidently she was hesitating, making up her mind to tell Anna all. Then indeed she would be watched.

'It struck me,' said Anna thoughtfully, when she did not speak, 'that Cynthia would have talked much more about us but that we were interrupted.'

'You were interrupted?' said Mrs. Severn through half-paralysed lips. Cynthia then *had* made up her mind.

'Yes, by Mr. Danby. I liked him, Clothilde. I think he'll make her a good husband. I think Dad has been prejudiced.'

'Who would not have been when she had such a lover as Canon Tremenheere, one of the county people?' said Mrs. Severn sharply.

'Well, I should say it's possible that Mr. Danby belongs to a county too.'

'Certainly he does. But it's only Buckingham.'

Anna had heard this before.

'I've no doubt there are plenty of good people in Buckinghamshire,' she said.

'Of course. But his is a mushroom growth compared to the Marlowes and Tremenheeres, or even ours—yours and mine, you know, Anna.'

'Who cares about being mushroom growths?' said Anna, tossing her head.

'What a dreadful world this would be if we were all Vere de Veres. I'm sure if I'm in the least better than he, he is welcome to the amount if it would agree better with your sense of the survival of the fittest. You seem very jealous for Cynthia's dignity, Clothilde. In fact I shall begin to think you're studying genealogy. I am certain when you see Mr. Danby you will say he is all he should be for the position he's going to take.'

'Going to take—has taken, I should say. What do you mean?'

'What he has taken is nothing, comparatively. But what he will take will prove him a useful man of good moral worth. Cynthia told me. He's not going to rest on his oars. They are both going to work for the good of others, and they have all sorts of plans. They discuss everything together. Some day he may stand for the Division. In Wonston itself they mean to work with the clergy.'

Mrs. Severn's heart sank. She had never imagined all this. Her dream of his encompassing every means to meet her faded into air. She had imagined that meeting, oh! most rapturously—how he would acknowledge her coolly, and she would win him by confessing her sin and her repentance; if he reproached and upbraided her she would plead with him. She must have his forgiveness! Could they not be friends? His wife need not know that they met. Might they not meet? Yes. She had meant him to forgive her indeed. She had meant to shake Cynthia's security. Excitement was before her at last, the precious, the darling excitement of playing with fire. No more tedious days and dreamless nights! And all for Lucius—the only person in the world, man, woman, or child, whom she had really loved!

And now?

'Do you mean—do you think, that he's a religious man?' she said.

Her voice was so dull and hopeless, her steps were lagging so, her face all at once looked so old and wan, that had Anna looked, she might have marvelled at least. But she did not. She was preoccupied. Her thoughts were alternately with the Marlowes and in Jersey. Now that the visit to the Pitons was drawing so near, she was entering into the spirit of it. She would get Ambrose to make Miss Josephine le Gallais send Borlase an invitation to the wedding, and afterwards they would have a glorious time driving about the Island. Yes! it was a delightful idea of Geoff's. She was to go for a few weeks before the wedding to superintend Douce's arrangement of the new furniture. Perhaps Borlase would wait and take her home. She had not a misgiving about Clothilde, and now she had given her a clue of interest which she would tell Mr. Severn to follow up; he must remember every detail of the Marlowes, and talk about them to her.

Thus she was talking half-mechanically. They were rounding the corner where the wood was thinner. The shade was no longer level. Glancing lights struck across them, dappling the undergrowth, glinting on the beck that ran into the Woss just below, and warming the little gray cottage whose reek was drifting off in a blue haze over the meadows.

'Religious?' she said dreamily. 'No, perhaps scarcely, and yet, in the broad sense of pure Christianity, I am sure he is, and probably more so since he knew Cynthia. Yes!' she added with sudden vehemence and an involuntary little stamp of her foot, 'depend upon it, Cynthia will make him good. She would make any one good. They will do their duty. She means to have as many duties as pleasures on her tablets. They're going to have a large party for the Twelfth,' she finished irrelevantly.

'Delightful way that of doing one's duty,' said Mrs. Severn.

'Very. Cynthia wants him to know all the Admiral's old party, and there are some friends of his and the Kerrs.'

They walked on in silence until they came in sight of Old Lafer. Then Mrs. Severn hazarded her last and most vital question.

'And what is Mr. Danby like?' she said.

There was a perceptible tremble in her voice, and she blushed like a girl. Frightened of herself, she averted her head lest Anna should see. All the warmth and spirit of an hour ago had deserted her. In their place was a chill, cramping dread, a paralysis of motive. It was as though the springs of hope were drying up. She shivered. To fall back into the old life would be intolerable. She could have shrieked against it, impotently. God forgive her! her reliance and hope had been that Lucius Danby might be a bad man. She knew this now, knew it

by the force of the contrast in the picture Anna had drawn.

Anna described him minutely. She had observed him minutely. Mrs. Severn almost smiled at the details so innocently given, so momentous to herself. It was ghastly. She was conscious of a sort of mental dismemberment and still not mental, not only that, any more. No! merely mental crises were over for her. She had reached at last the emotional plane, and that agonised the heart. Yes, she who had without a qualm or a sigh stretched others on the rack was there herself now. Every word Anna said brought back to her, with the vividness of a freshly-seared brand, memories of Lucius. The old figure; the old face—dark, severe, self-controlled, but always for her transfigured by love; the clasp of his arms; his kisses, rare, but the more infinitely precious for their rarity; his voice, the few words that were always so pregnant with meaning; his trust,

his faith, his reverence for her—God! she had thrown them all away. Madwoman that she had been!

Again and again she thought she had forgotten or that they only rested in her mind as relics of an old conquest, as proofs of an old power on which she might safely brood. Many a time she had dragged them into the daylight, half-resentful, half-gratified that they should still linger in their inmost nooks. She had derided them or smiled at her conceit. She had often wondered too what he had done, what had become of him, whom he had married, how many children he had. Had he called one *Clothilde?* She had been more than mad—a fool.

If only he had been near her she would have been faithful. Yes, yes, a thousand times yes! She had felt again to-day the same rush of blood through her frame that one glance of his had always sent there. One glance! Yes, she had had one glance

again to-day, and she was convinced that he had known her. But she could not be faithful from afar. Proximity, touch, were necessary to her. Without them she had dragged her anchors and drifted ashore. And she had calmly thought all was for the best; reflected sarcastically that doubtless there was a hidden good for all concerned; turned down the page with barely a pang for herself and still less pity for him, the constant lover in India who was working for her. She knew now that she had never dismissed him. He did not write, or come, or vouchsafe the slightest sign after her letter, but he had haunted her. No wonder she was afraid at Old Lafer on stormy winter nights; her own heart was a haunted chamber.

But this would not have been so terrible had she realised it when he was far away, when there had been no chance or prospect of a meeting. She could have battled it out then, or have let it battle her out. But now,

she would be unhinged every moment by the thought that she might see him at any turn. And not only see him, but see him as a stranger. And all the while she would be longing, craving, to feel him again as near as he once had been.

How was she to bear it? Love, which she had scarcely known as love, or deigned to treat as such, had indeed awoke and cried. Cried! it was shrieking at her. How was she to silence it? How was she to feed it? Was it really there to be strangled, choked; there, after all these years of ignorance and indifference?

She must live on a while longer in the hope of seeing him, of winning a mite from him—*even the dogs pick up the crumbs.* Perhaps he would give her a crumb of comfort; perhaps she would find the ashes were still embers, a flame might flicker up for her. Flicker, yes, she knew what that meant—the next instant it would go out.

And then what? *The blackness of darkness for ever.*

'How old am I?' she said to herself.

She was forty-one. And people lived to be sixty, seventy, eighty. Well, she never could; or if she could, she would not. A wild thought rushed into her head that she would tell her husband, and throw herself on his mercy. But he would give up his situation and take her away. And it would be more intolerable now to go away than to stay; or if the worst came to the worst and she got nerved by the courage of despair, to—do anything else. She shuddered in the sunshine. To what was she coming; had she come!

They were on the bridge now, and the sunshine streamed over them. Anna, talking and silent by fits and starts, went on. Mrs. Severn had dropped behind. She put up her parasol, fearful of Anna looking round and seeing her face. She was certain she

was livid. She must be. She felt so cold and ashen, all clay, her beauty withered; all clay but for the place in her side where her heart ached and ached. Poor heart! she placed one hand upon it. Oh, these chords! vibrating to the old, sweet, ardent tune, could she but tear them out! They tore at her—wasn't there a line somewhere about 'harp-strings broken asunder by music they throb to express'? Such pent-up music as this, that had been struggling to make itself heard for years, no wonder it nearly rent her. Yes, music had been in her heart, it might have been in her home, in her daily life; not that of the fingers on the violin or on the guitar, but in her heart of hearts, with Lucius.

Blind she had been, blind, unheeding, greedy; grasping at the shadow because it glittered more than the substance. And yet she had married a good man, this plain and homely John Severn. Yes, a thousand times better than she had deserved. He was only

another victim. What had she been but a snare, a lure? Her beauty had been fatal, a decoy. And she was spiritually rotten, wholly rotten at the core, a thing of horror. Had she not lived for months on the hope, the reliance, that Lucius Danby would be a bad man? And not only this, but would it not be she who had made him so? He had not been bad once. No, he had always been far better than she. And now she was ready to trade on it. Oh, she was vile!

She glanced round. Anna had gone on, and was half-way up the fields. She leant with her elbows on the rail of the bridge and looked over. But it was only a scanty summer stream at which she looked. There was not even a pool deep enough to reflect her, no face looked back at her. The water gathered into the slight hollows in the rocky bottom, then with a swirl escaped and was off again, gliding, flashing, foaming, gathering again, swirling again. No room here for her.

It was only conscious of itself, and wooed the sun, dispersing itself thinly, not encouraging more gloom and depth than was just decently sufficient to please the trout. It would have missed the trout. They added to its gaiety and liveliness, it watched as much for their glancing backs darting here and there as for the flies that hung above dancing in the sun.

'Happy little beck,' thought Mrs. Severn.

It really eased her to watch it. It was impossible that she should fling herself into it though!

There was a pool higher up the gill. A man had once been drowned there, had fallen in, it was always supposed, while drunk. It was called after him, Brockell's Pool. He had been a cousin of Luke Brockell, the man who had a trolly, and had once entered into some scandalous compact with Hartas Kendrew. She remembered Mr. Severn telling her something of the kind.

She had looked oftener at the pool since. It was deeper than any one knew, overshadowed by trees, and very dark and still. And there was not room on the banks for a jump. Any one going in must go in deliberately walking. Then, in an instant, they would lose foothold, fall forward, sink.

She shuddered again, and gathered her dress over her arm and went on.

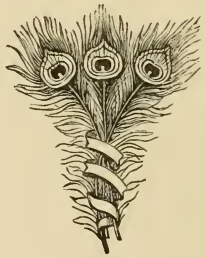
'No,' she said half aloud, 'not here, never here; nor there, in Brockell's Pool. But perhaps some day from Lafer Old Bridge. It's not so dark or so still, and it wouldn't be either too cold or too sunny, mocking me.'

But when she got into the meadows she turned, and standing again, looked over the brow of the woods to the point below which she knew the Hall lay. A mist came over her eyes; her lips trembled; a rush of blood flooded her face, then ebbing, left her paler than before.

'I love you with all my heart, Lucius,' she

said aloud but softly and slowly. 'And it's a poor heart because it aches, but oh! it might have been a rich one.'

Then she again put her hand to her side and began to climb the hill. She had realised that moral cowardice had bred in her mental courage. She could not dare think of sinking back into the old dull unexciting life, but she did not now quail before death.



MRS. SEVERN

PART III

CHAPTER I

MR. PITON'S OPINIONS

'WELL, Duke, old fellow, what do you want? A lollop along the beach? Too hot yet, but by and by, this evening perhaps, we'll go down, and you shall have a run.'

It was Anna who spoke. She was sitting in the garden at Rocozanne, and Duke, Mr. Piton's deerhound, had come and thrust his cold wet nose into her hand as it idly hung over the edge of her hammock chair.

Rocozanne was the oldest house in St. Brelade's. Up to the time of the wresting of the islands from the French it had been the priest's house. Since the building of the

Rectory at the bottom of the gorge beyond, the Pitons had rented it from father to son. It was a family known for its lack of daughters, and Anna's mother had been the only girl in five generations. The house was down on the Admiralty Charts as a landmark for vessels rounding Noirmont Point, between the bays of St. Aubin's and Portelet, and was therefore, by the Trinity House regulations, compelled to be whitewashed. From the crags near Les Creux on the road to the Battery, its roof seemed to dovetail into that of the church, to whose irregular peaked gable-ends and belfry it added importance. The church had been built in 1111. It was half-covered with ivy; the colouring of the roof was as soft and many-tinted as a mushroom, the walls were hoary with gray and orange and russet lichen. It stood under the edge of the hill, raised above the beach, and buttressed by a massive sea-wall that continued in a modified form along

the garden of Rocozanne. In calm weather the fishermen's boats were drawn up to the wall in a brightly-banded line of cream and scarlet and blue.

Between the church and the garden was a dense clump of evergreen oaks. An ivy-arched gateway led into the graveyard with its white marble tombstones glistening among bushes of laurustinus and barberry. From where she sat Anna could see the cross above her mother's grave, and trace the words upon it—

'To the beloved memory of Lucy Piton, wife of Gustave Hugo of Petersport, Guernsey, and only daughter of Ambrose Piton, late of Rocozanne. She died A.D. 18— Æt. 23.'

The old house was time-worn in style, but not in colour. Its latticed windows were sunk deep in squareheaded frames with leaded glass that rattled in the south-west gales. At the church end, a vine, now laden with

purple fruit, reached to the eaves, and fuchsias were trained along the lower window-sills. Above the porch was a dial. The garden was uniquely trim and pretty. The strip of lawn as smooth as velvet, the flower-beds a mass of roses, stocks, geraniums, and red and white lilies. The sea-wall was overhung with bushes of marguerites and chrysanthemums. In one corner the flight of stone steps leading down to the beach was concealed by clumps of pampas grass. It was like a bouquet for brightness and fragrance. There was shadow under the dense cool green of the oaks, but on a summer day everything else was in a blaze of sunshine. In front lay the bay, perfect as a sickle in form, its waters glancing and twinkling, and running up the beach with nothing more than a ripple. Anna could hear it against the wall for it was high tide. Yes, Old Lafer had not that musical soft plash, so playful, so lulling. No wonder she closed her eyes and

dozed. And Duke stretched himself against her with his head between his paws.

She had been here a fortnight, and it was eleven A.M. Every day was fully occupied. She found much more than she expected depending upon her taste and judgment. She went day after day into town to Ruché's with Josephine le Gallais and Ambrose, to choose, measure, and fit. Half the house was to be refurnished, and its dimensions made the most of to suit the requirements of a rather exacting bride-elect. But now carpets and curtains were all in hand, her bridesmaid's dress was ordered, the wedding was to be in a week, and Borlase was coming the day before. She had promised to stay with Mr. Piton while bride and bridegroom were away, and to arrange the house for their return.

Meanwhile she was as happy as the day was long; and though they sat up till twelve and breakfasted at eight, the day was never too long. No, it was far too lovely and

delightful and restful at Rocozanne! She had no anxieties. Every second or third mail brought her letters with capital home news; and apart from everything else it was worth being away to give Borlase the opportunity of proving his powers of correspondence. As she read and re-read his letters, she began to think she had never known anything but the outward man until now. He contrived to put himself into his letters. She had never thought him shy, but she did when she found how much he had had stored away for the courage-giving medium of paper. Then came apologies for boring her, lame excuses for a too rampant pen. And she laughed joyously to think how much she would learn from him and of him every hour when they were married and she would drive at his side on his long country-rounds.

Behind the house were a field and the orchard. Mr. Piton had an arbour in a corner of the orchard, furze-thatched and

lined with Indian matting. He spent most of his time here in summer. It commanded a prospect of all he most valued in his daily interests. The mouse-coloured cows, Nina and Nita, were tethered in the field. Now and then they spared a moment from cropping within their circles to look at him with soft and lustrous eyes of companionship, and in return he cheerily apostrophised them. The orchard bore his fruit-crop. He could count the pears on his favourite tree, and apportion them mentally for weeks before they were ripe ; so many with his respectful compliments to the Bailiff, so many to make up his Tithe to the Rector, so many for his own dinner-table. He could calculate the size of his apple-stack each year, as the ripening apples showed more clearly each day among the leaves. He had some choice apples, fit for better ends than the cider press. He would still have sound fruit for the Tithe when the time he foresaw as not remote had come and

his beloved beautiful Island was turned into a potato garden to supply London gormands with early tubers. The fruit harvest was the event of the year to him. When his servants had picked the trees clean, he mounted into each himself, peering at every cluster of scarlet or yellow leaves and shaking the boughs to assure himself they were not fruit. As he went up the ladder and disappeared among the boughs, he looked like a modern but antiquated Hamadryad. He was a quaint little figure with a seamed and ruddy face, short-sighted eyes and scanty gray hair. The cut of his coat was of unknown antiquity ; and it was a joke with him that the St. Heliers tailor, whom he induced to perpetuate it, only did so on condition that his name should not be mentioned. It was frocked, and the cloth was pleated into the two buttons at the back. He also wore a high-crowned narrow-brimmed hat, and spectacles. Excitements were rare at Rocozanne and could he

have proved that half a dozen apples had been left on the trees it would have made talk for kitchen and parlour for a week.

But the pears were the pride of his heart; no one could throw them into the cider press as persons who lacked discrimination might with the apples, juicy and warty indiscriminately. No one was allowed to interfere here. He spent hours in autumn on the top of his ladder, feeling each pear. He prided himself on gathering them in the very nick of time. The question of their readiness was not one of days but of moments; a bruise to their mellowing surfaces gave him a heart-ache. He had been known to get up at night and gather them by the light of a lantern when a gale had risen unexpectedly just at the critical time. When employed among them, nothing was allowed to interrupt him. If a friend turned in to discuss the hours at which the mail boats had crossed the bay, the want of a storm to bring in some vraic,

the last case of milk adulteration or smuggling, or the relative size of their cabbage-stalks, he conversed with abstracted pauses from amid the boughs. When alone he talked to himself, apostrophising the fruit in tender accents.

But the absorbing daily interest of the year was the arrival of the mails. His arbour was so cunningly placed that from one side he surveyed the orchard and from the other a segment of the Channel beyond the bay, between Rocozanne and the village. Across this segment was the track of the Southampton and Weymouth boats. He steadied his spy-glass upon the window frame and watched them round the Corbière Rocks and disappear beyond Noirmont. Then he could calculate how soon he should get his letters and papers and magazines.

The boat had just crossed to-day. He put down his glass and thought he would go and see what Anna was doing. Ambrose, of

course, would have gone spooning off to Les Creux. Les Creux was just opposite Rocozanne, beyond the church and half-way to the Battery, and he had had shrewd suspicions all through the courtship that Miss Josephine knew how to fly signals. He had often watched Ambrose sitting with his legs dangling over the sea-wall or walking up and down the lawn with his hands in his pockets and his eyes fixed on a certain point to the left of the young lady's home. Once, when he suddenly broke into a whistle and started off at a tangent for the steps to the beach, which was certainly a short cut to the Battery, it looked so remarkably like a call to *Attention!* that he precipitately levelled his spy-glass and was convinced he saw a flutter of white that could only be a handkerchief. All this sort of thing would make it lonely for Anna. He was just getting up, rather stiffly, when he heard the click of a gate. Looking across the field, he saw it was Anna herself with

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Duke at her side. Evidently they were coming to him.

Yes, here they were, crossing the grass. He was glad to sit down again. It was pleasant to watch her. Miss le Gallais was all very well, a nice cobby little thing with a *retroussé* nose that accounted for her expecting so much from Ambrose; but if only it had been Anna, nothing could have pleased him more. He had been a fool to let her go with Clothilde. She was his own niece, it would only have been natural to keep her, and Douce would have been a motherly body for her. But when he let her go he lost a chance for Ambrose. If she'd grown up with him all might have been different, and he might have been a grandfather long ago. Eh dear, eh dear; 'twas a sad thing to be so blind to the main chance in this world!

'Hillo, here I am!' he called, though he knew she knew.

She nodded and smiled. She had just

reached Nina and Nita and stopped to rub their foreheads. They took no notice of Duke. He was much too dignified a dog to care to upset their dignity. Then she came on to the orchard.

The grass was longer here, obliging her to hold her dress well up above her ankles. She made a pretty picture in her fresh pink cambric in the dappling lights and shadows under the old trees. Mr. Piton thought how few girlish figures the orchard had seen. But all the more vividly were those of his wife and his sister Lucy impressed upon his memory. His wife died when Ambrose was born, and Lucy only lived to see her little girl two years old. This girl was like the Lucy of his boyish days to the extent of a dark face, blithe ways, and a voice like a bird's; but the sparkle in her eyes and her spirit and temper were none of Lucy's. He had adored and idolised these two women; it was his nature to love warmly or not at all. He clung much

to old associations. It was natural when Rocozanne was the only home with which his family had been associated for some generations. Lucy, fondly cherished by their father and mother, had been the sunbeam, not only of the old house but of the village, when they were young together. He never could understand why she married so early, and that with a widower much older than herself, unless she had wanted to die early! The name of Lucy rested in his memory as the sweetest he knew. Once, the garden and orchard, ay, and the hills and crags and beach, had echoed with it. There was a fork in the sturdy branches of one old tree into which they had loved to climb together; on another bough, low and supple, he had swung her. But one day this trusted bough broke. And on another day sweet and lovely but frail Mrs. Hugo was brought to her old home to die.

He wished Anna had been called Lucy and lived at Rocozanne.

'Bother Josephine, deuce take Josephine,' he said to himself.

Then when she was close to him and had dropped her dress and was resting her hand on Duke's head, he said again, this time aloud,

'Deuce take Josephine!'

'Why? Did you want Ambrose?' she said.

'Ambrose? No. I only wish you'd wanted him.'

She understood and laughed.

'He wouldn't have wanted me, uncle!'

'Wouldn't he though? I vow I know better. And there's that other interloper, deuce take him too! To think you've never been to Rocozanne for years, and now only because you're both engaged! Why, if I'd put my veto upon the thing as soon as the breath was out of your poor mother's body, I couldn't have managed better than I have. Managed? Mismanaged rather; and Am-

brose spooning about alone for want of some one to spoon, until he'd lost you, and this Josephine turned up and flipped her fingers at him. Bless my heart, he went at her in sheer disgust of himself and me, old muddler that I am!'

'Nonsense, you're not an old muddler, quite the reverse. You know quite well such things must take their course. If people are thrown together intentionally they're sure to take a great dislike to each other. You have saved us from that and we're just what we always were, capital friends.'

'Friends? Fiddlesticks! Just what you oughtn't to have been. Friends I mean, not fiddlesticks. Bless me, how happy we should have been! What a felicitous trio. Here's Josephine 'll always be thinking which undertaker she'll send for for me. "Better to be ready," you know. But I'll have an oak coffin, can't abide stretched black cloth, gives me the creeps. If she hasn't afforded me an

oak coffin, she'll find when the will's read that Rocozanne goes to you.'

'Dear uncle,' said Anna, betrayed into seriousness by such serious allusions, 'she's very kind, I'm sure she is, and she'll improve after she's married. She's only one of those who jump into matrimony, don't glide. Some people soften the edges of every thing both for themselves and others. She isn't one of those, certainly. But once over, she'll settle into all that's nice and right. And you know what Ambrose is.'

'Oh yes, oh, hum; poor old Ambrose!'

'He's quite absurdly happy. It's very delightful, I think.'

Mr. Piton snorted.

'Very. She'll lead him; that nose of hers 'll do it.'

'It is a little *retroussé*, but so is mine, I'm certain.'

'Pshaw! Why draw invidious comparisons? She'll lead him by the nose, I say.'

'Well, nose or chin, looks or words, what does it matter? Something she must lead him with, of course.'

He laughed shortly.

'So you've found that out. "Something we women must lead these men with." Silly men, a flock of sheep. Does your doctor know your theories?'

'Now, uncle, don't misunderstand me.'

'And why not? Isn't every one misunderstood. Isn't this uniform and egotistical density of comprehension the curse of our intercourse with each other? I swear it is. I'll teach the science of sociology. Apply yourself not only to puzzle out your dear self, but to trace the zigzags of your neighbour. Hell may be "paved with good intentions," and a deal better pavement than it deserves, too! But our poet struck a truer note when he said the saints watched and "made allowance for us all"; eh, Anna?'

'Yes, yes, he did—

'Be near us when we climb or fall:
Ye watch, like God, the rolling hours
With larger, other eyes than ours,
To make allowance for us all.'

There was a moment's silence. Mr. Piton shuffled uneasily, and Anna stroked Duke's head and turned away, looking over her shoulder at the bay with its dancing glitter.

'Moral?' said Mr. Piton suddenly.

'Yes, there's a moral.'

'There always is. Deuce take the moral. *Moral*, make allowance for Josephine. Well, well, she's made it for me.'

'She has? How; how could she?'

'Now Anna—"And with the flatterers were busy mockers"—*how could she*, indeed? Well, you see I've a habit, inconvenient or bad, as you please, of—of—swearing, I suppose it is. *Deuce*, et cetera, you'll have heard me?'

'Yes, I have.'

'Papa le Gallais is most circumspect, much more so than Papa Piton. She plays a

rubber and she'd heard the term there, and when first I said "deuce take it" before her, she said she was very glad I was so fond of whist, because we could play dummy games on winter nights. That was all she knew of a deuce. I believe Ambrose explained it to her afterwards. When next she came she said she had been shocked. I said I had too. I begged her pardon, but feared she would have to continue to be. It was a toss-up whether she'd give Ambrose his ring back or make allowance. She saw from the first that I was incorrigible. Bless my heart, if she hadn't given in, though, we should not have been in for this house-out-of-windows affair. Do you think I've been a prudent man to give them house-room, Anna? It was a serious question with me whether they shouldn't go into town and we'd keep clear of each other? But it might have straightened my lady a bit in her style of housekeeping, and if her, then him. And on the whole

I fancied I might hate myself for a selfish old dog-in-the-manger if I didn't let them share here. The place is far too big for me. It'll house a dozen grandchildren. And there's a prestige about it with us Pitons, you know. I thought Ambrose would think he'd knocked his name off if he'd to take up with a brand-new villa abomination in St. Helier's. And I should always have been afraid of daubing my coat-skirts with the fresh paint, every thing spick and span, brand-new, you know. Phew!'

'It's very good of you to let them come; Ambrose was speaking of it the other day. It has made him so happy. He said how good you were.'

'He did? Come, that's timely. And she, Josephine, did she?'

'She was not there.'

'But not at all? Hussy, she's mute! I know how she fancies the place, though; no stucco and emerald green sun-shutters here.

And she's a le Gallais, though of the younger branch. Well, well, they must let me be happy in my way, and they shall be happy in theirs. But she wanted to turn out the little salon. Ah! I couldn't get over that. It was his mother's own boudoir. And there's the big one at her disposal. No, by Heaven, she shall never touch the little salon, Anna.'

'She will never want to,' said Anna soothingly, as she saw the flush that rushed over his face, and how his hand trembled as it struck the window-frame. 'Ambrose named that too, dear uncle. She did not know, she had not understood. He explained, and she was quite satisfied. She thinks it very pretty.'

But apparently this exasperated Mr. Piton still more.

'Pretty! from her lips,' he exclaimed. 'Desecration! She'd no right to say what she thought of that room. It is sacred, *sacred*, Anna. That room labelled by her—and all

its associations! However, one must excuse the young and heedless who have not looked into open graves. May she not go early too and leave the big salon haunted for Ambrose! May they have long and happy lives, eh, Anna?'

'Yes, uncle, yes indeed,' she said warmly.

'And you, Anna,' said Mr. Piton with sudden sharp humour, 'if I don't think this Borlase fellow good enough for you, I'll kick —Ha! ha! what *did* Clothilde say when she found she was going to lose you? I've often wondered how she took it. A lazy creature, isn't she?'

'She can't help it, poor Clothilde!' said Anna gently.

Mr. Piton laughed.

'Yes, yes, poor Clothilde!' he said, as he got up, stretched himself, and yawned, and thought no more about it.

CHAPTER II

A FACE ON THE STEAMER

Borlase crossed on a Saturday night, and thus arrived in Jersey at seven on Sunday morning. He was so tired by the long journey as to be thankful that his quarters were in St. Helier's. He got to bed at once instead of having a drive before him.

A few hours later he walked over to St. Brelade's. In going down the village he met the afternoon congregation from the French service dispersing in all directions. At the churchyard gate a baptism was entering. The baby, borne in its mother's arms in a long white robe, looked like one of the

white tombstones lying flat, as the little procession wound among the upright ones. He watched it with his hand upon the gate of Rocozanne garden.

No one was in the garden. It seemed to burn in the sun; the blooming wealth of flowers with the sea beyond dazzled him. The house windows were wide open, so was the door within the porch. He was just going to ring when he heard voices and Anna's exclamation of his name. He turned. She and Mr. Piton were appearing above the sea-wall behind some clumps of pampas grass. They had been along the beach in hopes of meeting him.

'You ought to have been staying here,' said Mr. Piton. 'Never knew anything so extraordinary as your being in town with this big house nearly empty. When Ambrose is gone, you must really take his room. He's at Les Creux now, his last chance for backing out. What a change can be compassed in a

day! To-morrow he will not only be in the noose of matrimony but in France. They are going to Havre. He says there's a pier there where they can sit as he does here on the sea-wall. Miss le Gallais shares his taste for dangling her feet and staring out to sea.'

'Geoff can't possibly have Ambrose's room, uncle,' said Anna. 'It's the very one that is still to be done. You're very good, but really we must not put Douce and the maids out in that way.'

'I should not think of such a thing,' said Borlase, in obedience to a pinch and a frown from his ladylove.

'Nonsense. Douce must not always be made a consideration. It's preposterous that I should not be able to extend hospitality to my own, my only niece's intended husband, just because a minx of a Josephine has caught Ambrose! I know Anna, she's for spoiling Douce to keep all smooth for Josephine.

Believe me, Borlase, she's always ready to spoil every one all round. She has explained her view of the matter to me, and I made her distinctly understand my comfort was not to be considered. I declare I was quite hurt when you answered my invitation by saying you'd taken rooms at Bree's. All Anna's doing, I'm certain. She's a managing woman!'

Borlase laughed, feeling himself between two fires, with Mr. Piton scowling and Anna shaking her head at him.

'I fancy Anna thought I wanted exercise,' he said.

'Now, Geoff, you know I know you have come here for a rest. You're not very far away, and there are trains all day long to and from St. Aubin's, and I'm sure to be on the road between here and there. You're not badly off, I'm sure. I can't expect you men to know what a lot there'll be for Douce to do now. You must just trust me to know best.'

'Superior airs of womanhood!' snorted Mr. Piton. 'Well, what news do you bring of the Lafer Hall pair? I took a fancy to that bright, golden-haired, manorial goddess of yours. Upon my word there are some odd turns in this world's affairs—hum, ha, I think I'll leave you,' he added hastily.

The wedding passed off well. Anna previously warned Borlase, however, that it must not be considered a typical one, from the fact that although there was a large party in church, the ceremony itself was conducted in privacy. This was owing to the construction of the church. A stranger old place Borlase had never seen. It lacked either proportion or uniformity; bulky arches at various angles intercepted perspective; there were unexpected flights of stairs in odd corners; frail and painfully narrow high-backed pews faced the pulpit at every angle; the chest-like communion-table occupied the end of a narrow aisle; the pulpit was sur-

mounted by a cerulean blue sounding-board studded with gold stars; whitewash and cocoa-nut matting predominated. But from the battered and dented massive walls there depended some tattered silken banners, their gilt-tipped staves leaning forward, trophies from the old French wars. Anna had been at service here on winter days when wind and surf roared in unison outside, and darkness was gathering. It was ghostly then. The Rector's figure in the flickering circle of candlelight round the pulpit, the faces scattered above the pews, seemed to merge into confusing vagueness and vanish. She imagined corpse-like faces peering round the arches and files of shrouded figures in the aisles. All seemed mould, mist, and ghostliness, and the preaching voice a whisper brought on a breeze that had lingered over empty graves.

But it was a glorious autumn day when Ambrose was married, and the sun streamed

through the pale windows. Nobody saw anybody beyond their neighbours. It was of no avail to crane the neck. Pillars such as these were uncompromising protests against curiosity. Every one could hear the Rector's sonorous drone in one corner, but to turn in hopes of seeing also was to find themselves face to face with another stretch of whitewash. There was nothing to be done but read the inscriptions on the black mural tablets or stare at the banners. It was always an open question at the St. Brelade weddings, whether the bridegroom had been properly nervous. There was no excuse for his being so when he was invisible. As for the bride she was sorry that the effective disposal of her train must go unseen. But if it were a fine day she generally managed to display its dimensions in crossing the graveyard. Little Mrs. Ambrose Piton did so. She was very self-possessed. Before leaving the breakfast-table she made a speech, particu-

larly requesting that no slippers or old shoes should be thrown, for neither she nor her husband wished to be half-blinded or bruised. This quenched the ardour of various reckless spirits who had been betting chocolates and noûgat upon their ability to just miss vulnerable points.

At Rocozanne they were very glad when it was over. Mr. Piton possessed his garden in peace that evening, freed from the uneasy sense of invisible cords of communication with Les Creux. Borlase and Anna, sauntering on the beach, were mutually pledging themselves to a much quieter affair.

'Just our two selves, nothing more is necessary,' said Anna.

'And you in a short gown,' said Borlase.

'Ah! you don't want to put your foot into more than you can help,' she said.

'Quite so,' said Borlase. 'How well we understand each other, dear, don't we?'

It was now that his holiday began.

Anna was at his beck and call. He had protested against Bree's and taken up his quarters at Harden's in St. Brelade's. This saved him a good deal of temper against the caterpillar of a train which made itself agreeable to every cluster of houses round St. Aubin's Bay, and a good deal of time spent uselessly in the walk across the cliffs beyond. Harden's was five minutes from Rocozanne, and commanded the whole circle of the bay with black-browed Noirmont for one horn, and the soft red Corbière crags for the other. Behind, the amphitheatre of hill closed in in dazzling colouring of blowing heather and golden gorse. Here and there was a clump of dark pines or a Martello tower. The chestnuts and evergreen oaks thick in the winding gorge behind the church looked like a velvet ribbon. Sun and sea smiled at each other. Borlase felt that he had found his ideal place.

He and Anna made excursions every day.

Sometimes they walked, sometimes they drove in Mr. Piton's dogcart. He generally came into the garden while they were still at breakfast. Then he leant with his arms on the window sill, talking through the open window. Or Anna was arranging flowers in the hall, and he watched her from the porch, and plucked the sprig she wanted for the final touch. Sometimes she was coming downstairs with her hat and parasol.

He liked to see her on the stairs. It was a pretty hall. The staircase was shallow-stepped, and its frail banisters were twisted and painted dark blue. The walls were washed with pale Wedgewood yellow, the flagged floor was scoured on either side of a strip of dark blue matting. Roses filled a big china bowl on the oak table against the wall, under which was Duke's water-trough. The shafts of sunshine were diapered with flecks of shadow from the creepers on the porch.

In this frame Anna, in a fresh light morning-gown, was a bewitching picture. It was but a stride, and his arm was round her as she reached the last step. Mr. Piton, with the door of the little salon incautiously left ajar, would think Rocozanne an infectious place for sweethearting, and wonder whether he should live to see his children's children renewing the game. But it would be with a difference.

'They'll do it by telephone then,' he thought. 'Words and kisses and looks at so much the dozen. And the worst of it will be they'll never know what they miss.'

'We'll have a boat to-day,' said Borlase after one of these pleasant early experiences.

'And rock in the bay, won't we?' said Anna.

'Unless I were to row you out to St. Owen's. It's as calm as a mill-pond.'

Anna shook her head.

'If thunder came it would soon be ruffled,

Geoff, and I'm an arrant coward on the water. Let us tack about in our own waters. We'll go as far as the lobster cages under Noirmont, and wait for the mail-boat to pass.'

They went down the steps and along the beach to the rocks near the life-buoy. Here a fisherman rowed his boat up. It was easy to step in off one of the ledges overhanging the anemone-fringed pools, delicious to glide out into the diamond-sparkling sea. Anna felt it idyllic, Borlase heavenly.

'It was nothing short of an inspiration that sent me here,' he said. 'And a week ago I was fool enough to think nothing could beat a Yorkshire moor. But here it isn't only ling but everything. What could be more perfect than this scene so far as it goes?'

'That is, minus sport. Give me a Yorkshire moor, undisturbed by guns and dogs, and I should prefer it to this.'

'We had some capital sport on the Lafer

moors this year, by Jove, and a tremendous stretch to work too,' said Borlase. He had pulled out into the open, and now leant on his oars. 'We went straight as the crow flies from the plantation below the pits to Wherndale, struck Black Dyke, and turned up to Great Haw and Alderdale Tarn. There were ten guns and five sets of butts. The wind was for us, the birds lay well, the beaters were drilled to their business, not a dog to bother us, and coveys rising nicely in a popping sort of way that made one feel the moors were alive but not packed. It's my favourite time for grouse, between the dogs on the Twelfth and packs in October. It was smart work, but not haphazard. I could wing my bird, not smash him up. I fancy some of the men would be astounded at the execution done. Seven crack shots and three poor ones and we made one hundred and seventy odd brace.'

'It would be the first time those moors

had been driven. I wonder what the poachers thought.'

'So did I. Kit Kendrew was among the beaters, and old Hartas dodged about at our skirts. Times are bad for Hartas. No scope for poaching now! I should think he drew some comparisons between the old times and the new. In the Admiral's time there was a quiet party of six guns, as many keepers and servants and admirably-trained dogs; they drove up to the moors, and after a day of quiet walking over the heather drove home again. When the birds became too wild to shoot over the dogs, they were left to the hard-working skill of the keepers at daybreak. But now there's a regular army goes up, and an organised mob of beaters with red, blue, and white flags. I fancy Hartas would realise after the first drive that if he still wanted to poach grouse he couldn't. But he's a queer old fellow, rather touched in the brain, I fancy.

What do you think he said to me one day?'

'I should never think much of anything he said, Geoff.'

'I don't. Still one remembers. It was one day when I was riding along the road to East Lafer, and I met him and he signed me to stop. We'd been shooting the day before and he had hung about. He jerked his thumb over towards the Hall and said, "What do you think of 'em?"—"Who?" I said. "Well, young Madam and her man." —"I think they're a handsome and happy couple," I said. He grinned, leered rather —you know the kind of facial distortion he undergoes. "Ay," he said, with an oath, "they're what they look. It's none show-off. There's none a skeleton in her cupboard, but there will be some day, and I'll put it there. I ken a thing or two that'll kill her light-someness." I smiled, and he swore again.'

'What did you say?' said Anna.

'I told him he was an old fool, and rode on.'

'I should think so indeed. As though he could hurt her!'

'What a happy phrase that was of Mr. Piton's, Anna,—"bright, golden-haired, manorial goddess!"'

'Oh! he quite fell in love with her.'

'Too late, when Danby had done it so thoroughly. He means to do everything thoroughly. He is to the manner born. There'll soon be no better-stocked moor than Lafer within twenty miles. One day when we were out Mrs. Danby and her friends came up and lunched with us. I had the felicity of assisting her to some pigeon-pie and apricots. A charming creature, Anna! She might walk into the "dream of fair women" any day. I declare I entered into Rossetti's feeling about "ripe-cornish hair," only that it struck me it was still more apricoty.'

'Did it ever strike you too, Geoff, that in spite of all you are, you are not poetical?' said Anna, looking at him from within the shadow of her parasol, with a satirical smile.

'Forcibly. Many a time,' said Borlase heartily. 'I knew you would be disillusioned on the point at some not remote stage of our intercourse, and the sooner the better.'

'For the sake of my peace of mind?'

'Perhaps not, exactly. But illusions are a disease.'

'I never suffered from one on this score; why, dear old Uncle Piton has far more poetry in him than you have. You could never have phrased that description of his of Cynthia that you have just quoted. Of course you can say nice things, deliberately too, which is more than I can do. I always find that you're most pleased with what I say when I'm most literal and matter-of-fact, and that's what I can't help being.

Still, you are not poetic. I only feared you might be certain that I did think you so.'

'Under the circumstances, eh, Anna?' said Borlase, smiling.

'Oh no, not at all. I never idealise people. Now, Geoff, look where you're going. We shall run into the cages.'

'Yes we shall, if that means shaving them by exactly two yards. If I'm not poetical, I'm mathematical. And I preserve my wits under aggravation. Do you know there's a new baby at the Mires, Anna?'

'No. Whose?'

'Why, Mrs. Kit Kendrew's, of course. A girl.'

'I am glad.'

'Yes. She said you would be. It strikes me she's a young woman of perception, and knows pretty clearly when her friends will be glad and when sorry. Well, Hartas will have to give in more than ever now. Kit will be a mild argument in comparison to

the baby. She'll pretty soon define the sort of argument she will be to his creed.'

'You have no right to drench yourself with poems if you will garble the poetry out of them,' said Anna decisively.

'"'Tis the nature of the beast." The idea I can lay hold of, but not crystallisation. Rhyme and rhythm harass me. Prose is healthier for every one. What's the use of dragging out a thought into the convolutions of a shell when it can be expressed as straight as a dart? The system fossilises thought.'

'Fertilises, I say, Geoff. It gives one more time. Here comes the boat,' she added, suddenly shifting a little on the thwart and leaning forward. 'We're just near enough to be well rocked, and we won't go a bit nearer. Do you hear the engines? Yes, here she comes round Corbière with passengers from stem to stern. And a lovely crossing they'll have had. Geoff, put down those oars, I won't be taken any nearer.'

She had clutched the side of the boat and spoke peremptorily, a look of terror darting from her eyes. He had slipped the oars into the water again and was pretending to throw his strength into a long pull. But it was only pretence. They did not move an inch nearer the steamer's track as she came on with throbbing steam and a long drift of smoke hanging above the silver cleavage furrowed by the screw. They could have discerned the faces that looked down upon them from the deck and the officers on her bridge. The crew was aloft reefing the sails that had helped them on their way through a calm and starry night. It was beautiful to see her describe an outer half-circle corresponding with that of the bay into the shore, and disappear behind Noirmont with steam shut off and her track marked by a ruffle of sparkling scintillations in a coinage of flakes.

'I think there's nothing I like better than having you on the water,' Borlase said, when

they had drifted back towards the buoy on the rising tide. 'You are a totally different personage then to what I ever imagined you could be. It's the only circumstance I've ever known you incapable of rising to, the one exception that proves you dependent and unself-reliant and timid, delightfully timid; in fact, after all, thoroughly womanly. I like the failing of your courage, since it is I who have the right to reassure you. But all the same it's absurd of us not to do more than potter about here. You ought to have more confidence in my taking you into no danger. Just look what every one else does.'

He raised his oar in the rowlock and pointed to the beach and horizon. The whole contingent of visitors seemed to have had recourse to the boats to-day. They were putting off from every few yards on the beach, running up sail and scudding off to the open sea. The bay was alive with them; their bright colours and white or lateen sails

gave a regatta-like effect, unless, as Anna thought, they were more like a flock of gulls as they buoyantly dipped and rose and tacked to and fro. In the distance the semicircle of houses gleamed dazzlingly white, their emerald green and pink sun-shutters closed until sundown; crags, ling and gorse behind, and in front a fringe of coarse grass topping the sandbank under which glowed groups of children and nursemaids, more French than English, in every colour of the rainbow, like a great parterre of flowers. Only the church and Rocozanne seemed to hold aloof, turning disapproving gables upon the obtrusive population, and looking out to sea with the patient dispassionate gaze of centuries in which they had been linked together without change, while men were born and lived and died and were forgotten.

Anna looked at it all dreamily. A gayer scene could not be or one more wholesomely frivolous and pleasure-loving. It would have

passed away in a few days before autumn storms set in. But her thoughts had wandered.

'Geoff,' she said, 'did you see the people on the boat, to distinguish their faces, I mean?'

'I could have done had I wished, but I did not attempt it. Why? Did you?'

'Yes, I did. At least I saw one for a moment, and it was like Clothilde. Strange, was it not? Just for an instant a face looked over a boy's shoulder and I met its eyes. The face was like hers, but of course it was fancy. It vanished directly, but I seem to see it yet, slurred as though in a dream. But it could only be fancy, Geoff?' she turned and looked at him anxiously.

'Of course, my dearest,' said Borlase with robust decision. 'What in the world could bring Mrs. Severn here? Your letters have always been perfectly satisfactory, haven't they?'

'Yes, even from Dad. Perhaps there'll be some to-day. Row quickly, Geoff, and we'll land and drive out to town before lunch. Then we shall get them at once.'

'We can't beat the boat into port,' said Borlase.

'Oh no. She'll be in now.'

They looked at each other; the same thought was in both faces. It might have been well to see her passengers land one by one.

CHAPTER III

THE SOLVING OF A PROBLEM

Mr. Piton was considerably surprised when asked if the dog-cart might at once be prepared for a drive into town. They could scarcely be back before the hour for lunch. Why in the world did Anna want her letters when Borlase was with her? But, of course, the dog-cart was at their disposal.

They reached St. Helier's just before the country mail-bags were closed, and the Rocozanne letters were at once handed over the counter. There was a budget for Mr. Piton, two for Borlase, but none for Anna. One of Borlase's was from his *locum tenens* in Won-

ston. He broke the seal and glanced hastily through it. But there was no Wonston news except of a professional character.

'I wish there had been a letter from home,' said Anna wistfully. 'It's three days since I heard; I have always heard every second or third. I suppose no news is good news. Do you mind driving down High Street, Geoff? I want some camphor at a chemist's, and whilst I am here I might as well market. It will save time to-morrow, when we are going out to Gorée.'

Borlase did as she wished. He was convinced that her object in performing this business was to look at the people whom they might meet. He had purposely, and without saying anything, driven into town by the quays. But the bustle attendant upon the daily arrival of the mail-boat had subsided; passengers, luggage, and vehicles had dispersed; the boat was in process of being swabbed down; the usual contingent of

sailors and out-at-elbows loiterers were the only occupants of the wharves. He too had glanced about keenly. Although all the while anathematising Anna's anxiety as preposterous, he still had an uneasy feeling that there was no knowing what might happen at Old Lafer at any time, and no certainty as to what Mrs. Severn might do. When however they found no letters for Anna he was at once reassured. Had anything happened, letters, or still more likely, a telegram, would have been despatched instantly. But he realised that Anna's tension of anxious feeling must be much keener than his and so he humoured it to the utmost degree in his power.

They drove slowly through all the principal streets, which, it being mid-day, were tolerably busy. Anna added to the camphor and marketing some French confectionery and a bracelet which she had left a few days earlier to be repaired at Le Geyt's. She also called at the Circulating Library for another

of Hardy's novels, all of which to her delight she had found there; and finally they went to the station to regulate their watches, as Borlase said. She went into the little waiting-room which was as usual full; there was also the usual group round the old woman who roasted chestnuts under the clock. But nowhere was there a face or figure that was familiar.

'Are you satisfied?' said Borlase, as he helped her up again to a seat at his side.

'I suppose I ought to be,' she said. 'But strange to say the very want of success in what has, I suppose, been a search—though an impromptu and haphazard one—has made me more certain that I was not mistaken. I daresay you think me a goose, but I would prefer Clothilde to be anywhere rather than here, whatever has happened. Not for worlds would I have Uncle Piton know all—what she is, I mean.'

'Does she correspond with him?' said Borlase.

'Oh no, at least not that I know of. I am sure he would not care to write to her.'

Borlase put his hand into his breast-pocket and drew out the whole packet of letters. He gave them to her.

'While you were in there I looked through them again more particularly,' he said, 'and I am almost certain her handwriting is among them. The post-mark too is Wonston, and that almost convinces me she has written to him. Look for it, Anna.'

Anna's face blanched, indeed, the next moment. She singled out an envelope which was certainly addressed to Mr. Piton in Mrs. Severn's handwriting.

'What can have happened?' she said, gasping. 'Something has happened, I'm sure of it. Can she have done that dreadful thing again, and has he been harsh and terrified her? He was very determined. He

will not live with her if she sins so. I told you, Geoff. Has he told her this himself? And can she possibly be writing to Uncle Piton to have her here? But she must know she cannot possibly come, with Ambrose and Josephine returning almost at once too! And if she has been so mad as to tell him the truth, he will be furious. He won't pity her as Dad did.'

Borlase thought it very natural that all this should occur to her. It had occurred to himself as he sat waiting during the few moments she was in the station. It also seemed more possible now that Mrs. Severn had indeed been upon the boat.

'If she is coming here, perhaps she is doing the wisest thing,' he said gently. 'Not that she can mean to throw herself upon Mr. Piton's generosity, but because you and I are here at present. You will be kind to her and I can make ar——' he broke off, seeing the horrified misery on her face.

'Oh! I understand,' she said, with a shadow of a smile. 'You think it may really have come to that. Is it not a sad and dreadful thought that Clothilde, my sister, and so gifted and handsome, should be the very one and the only one who brings wretchedness into our home? She is the only person I have ever known intimately who is not good. There is no depending upon her, in more ways than one. What will her children think when they know what she is? They don't respect her now. Soon they may lose too what they still think is love.'

'Oh, Anna, one may still love, even in the face of the greatest faults. You will?'

'Yes, I will, Geoff,' she said passionately.

Their talk had been so earnest that they had not noticed the road or how quickly they were getting over the ground. They were both surprised to find themselves driving into St. Aubin's.

'What will you do about that letter?'

Borlase asked, as they presently slackened pace up the hill beyond the stone quarry. It was the very spot where Mr. Severn had stood eighteen years before and watched the workman in a blue blouse chipping out the stone—as a momentary interlude to his ardent thoughts of Clothilde Hugo, who was to be his wife to-morrow. But this they did not know. Happily such contrasts in our lives and their excruciating pathos are known only to ourselves.

'I shall take it to him and say it is from her, and ask him to open it at once,' said Anna.

'He may think it strange of you.'

'I can't help that, Geoff. I must know. Suspense gnaws me. Otherwise he might defer telling me anything until it was impossible I should not know. I will see him read it. And supposing there were any shock in it for him I could soften it, perhaps.'

'Well, I fear we shall have kept him waiting for lunch,' said Borlase.

They drove on rapidly after having ascended the hill, but in spite of this they were ten minutes behind time when they turned in at the stable-yard. Anna ran on but waited on the step for him to rejoin her.

'I shall not give him this until after lunch,' she said.

But when they entered the dining-room, Mr. Piton was just rising from the table. He had not waited for them, but feeling hungry, had ordered his meal a little earlier than usual. He was going into the garden and Anna followed him. He sat down upon the wall, spy-glass in hand, but putting this down produced his pipe and tobacco.

'What, my letters,' he said, when Anna held them out for him. 'I hope you've got what you wanted; eh, what, one from Clothilde for me, do you say? Nonsense, never writes—this it?' as she pointed with trem-

bling fingers to a certain envelope. He stared at her with sharp scrutiny while she proffered her request. She felt herself to be too desperately eager, but what less could she be? She was desperately eager; and anxious to the point of a spasmodic chokiness in her throat. If what she feared had happened at Old Lafer, ruin and desolation were around them all; the whole fabric of home-life had tumbled in pieces, was disorganised, dismembered. Black despair would be in Mr. Severn's heart; in the children's bewilderment, incomprehension, and then—so soon, too soon, resentment and sad loathing. Thenceforth, life for them would be patched up; some scanty veil would conceal, yet reveal, the inner want of simple and pure reverence for her whose office and holy service it should have been to ennoble and ease and beautify all the diverse veins and arteries of daily life, thence leading them to a straight treading of broader paths than were possible in the safe

though circumscribed shelter of a happy home where father and mother ruled in unison. They, in turn, should have learned to rule, thinking always of the shining light of example by which they could tread themselves and lead others. Instead of which—yes, Anna had never felt it so poignantly as now when the tension of watchfulness at Old Lafer had for a time been eased—there was a constant terror and an impending confession. Had not Elias said, 'Woe to her by whom the offence cometh.'

Apparently Clothilde's letter was short. She could see it as Mr. Piton opened it, and the paper fluttered in his hand. But few words might tell much. She watched his face while he read it. The expression changed, but assuredly there was no rush of strong surprise or revolted feeling. She began to breathe freely again. After all, she might be wrong; she had been rash, had probably roused suspicions that would have to

be allayed as best she could without impinging on the truth.

Mr. Piton read the letter through. Mrs. Severn wrote a large scrawling hand, and these characters now occupied a page and a half. He refolded it thoughtfully, and then again fixed his eyes keenly on her with a troubled look of perplexity.

'Nothing is the matter, Anna,' he said. 'She wants me to tell you something, an old affair, that's all. It will wait till after your lunch, my dear.'

'Is that all?' cried Anna, in a tone of boundless relief, while colour rushed again into her face. She was unable at the moment to think of anything else, and turned to run back to the house with her lightened heart winging her steps. But then a thought struck her and she faced round again.

'Is she at home?' she said.

'At home? Of course she is. Where else would a decent woman be?' said Mr.

Piton testily. 'Come out here again when you're ready, and bring Borlase with you,' he shouted after her as she disappeared within the porch.

Left to his own reflections he read his other letters, crumpling up the various envelopes and throwing them over the wall, where they made a flotilla for the tide to play with, and then reopened Mrs. Severn's. Its envelope he did not throw away. He was conscious of a sudden perception of the mysterious and dramatic. Assuredly Anna had feared more than a trivial domestic trouble, yet he did not think her thoughts had run on illness and death. He might have concluded they did, had he not had Mrs. Severn's letter before him. But the sudden request she made in that letter, without preamble or explanation, at once transfixed his suspicion in a totally different direction, and all the more strongly because he was now convinced that he did not know all about her

that there was to know, that Anna knew, for instance. Otherwise, there was no reason in her anxiety to have the letters early that day. He knew all were in good health at Old Lafer when last she had heard. Yet she had suffered anxiety that bordered on terror; he had seen it in her face. On what score was it, could it be, but on that of Lucius Danby? Mr. Piton trembled as this thought framed itself. What folly was Clothilde committing? With what sin was she trifling? Why was he asked to give Anna this tardy information as to Danby's identity and former connection with themselves? Would it explain what had been incomprehensible and resented as such by Anna? Would it satisfy or appal her?

When Borlase and Anna presently came out of the house, Borlase carrying a hammock-chair for her and making merry over its awkward disposal of its double-jointed limbs, Mr. Piton was feeling limp and dispirited.

Borlase noted in a moment an unusual pallor on his face in place of its usual ruddiness; his eyes too were heavy, and his whole air proved the loss of the jaunty cheeriness that generally distinguished him. He had not been so fully reassured as Anna by her report of the contents of the letter. His soul abominated concealment, it never boded good. What had been concealed that it was now suddenly expedient to reveal? He was more curious than she. Having dismissed the one fear that had overpowered her, she became gay again and speculated merrily over the impending revelation. But Borlase was not certain that she was not partly acting. He thought it unlikely that she did not really share his own feeling that, where Mrs. Severn was concerned, the air was leaden yet loaded with electricity, and admitted only of dangerous complications.

'Sit down, Geoffry,' said Mr. Piton, pointing to the wall. 'Let's be on a level both of

eyes and comprehensions as far as possible. I told Anna you were to come too, because you and she will soon be man and wife, and this affair—if it be such as I fear—must be naked and open to both of you in order that you may have every advantage in whatever action is necessary. I don't think it has entered into her—Clothilde's—calculations that you too would receive this confidence, but that does not matter. Now, I'll read her note to you. It's the easiest and most explicit way. Nothing can be more explicit than she is herself, as I think you too will say when you hear this.

'"Dear Uncle Piton—I hope you are well and have good news from Ambrose and Josephine.

'"We shall be glad to have Anna home. I am writing this to ask if, before she returns, you will tell her of my old engagement to Lucius Danby, who has now married Miss Marlowe. I know that Miss Marlowe called

upon you when in Jersey two years ago.—Believe me, your affectionate niece, Clothilde Severn."'

When he finished there was complete silence. Had his two listeners heard that years ago this Clothilde had committed some awful crime of blood, they could not have been struck into a sterner paralysis of action. The warring of the two natures within her appeared to them as by a lightning flash of comprehension. The coldness of this letter was Self, and her husband whom she had never loved; its one note of interest was Self again, but now instinct with passion. They could both read between the lines. They looked at each other as they thought it all out. It was with an inexpressible pang that Borlase realised that Anna too must fit the links in this corroded chain with its tainting rust. All was clear as daylight to himself. He did not need the evidence of his evidence, yet he could not for the life of him

prevent himself from remembering bit by bit.

With Anna conviction was not so swift. Woman-like, she felt before she knew. But upon her too there rushed the overwhelming conviction by degrees, as, piece by piece, memory helped her too to fit each in, that Clothilde — as a problem — was now solved.

'Well, what do you think?' said Mr. Piton at last.

Borlase waited to be certain Anna wished it before he spoke. 'I think it is a catastrophe,' he said then.

He got up, and after one or two turns up and down the garden came back, and leaning over Anna's chair kissed her lightly on the forehead, while pretending that he only gave her a sprig of mignonette to smell. She knew of what unswerving constancy that kiss was the seal.

'Was it anything connected with Danby

that you feared to hear, Anna?' said Mr. Piton.

'No. How could it be, uncle? I knew nothing.'

'But you suspected?'

'No, I did not even suspect,' said Anna. She and Borlase had exchanged a swift glance that counselled each other to silence on further truths. 'I knew she was unhappy. I had no clue. But I never knew what would happen. I only had always the feeling that something would.'

'Then you did not see them meet the first time or subsequently?'

'They have never met,' she said; then she instinctively added, 'at least they had not before I left home.'

Mr. Piton then gave them particulars of the whole story so far as he knew it. He confessed that he had been kept in the dark at the time of her marriage as to the supposed

rupture between her and Danby, and had never been able to reconcile himself to the idea of her preferring Mr. Severn, or being happy with him. He only learnt the truth many years later. He told them how Danby himself had learnt it, there, in that very garden where they sat now, and he also described the visit Cynthia had paid them in ignorance. He had often wondered if Danby had since told her the facts of the case. He wondered what the whole facts were now, and concluded by moralising over the deceit involved in such a woman as Clothilde having been so strong an object of devotion to two such men. Her impunity had lain in the absence of one.

When presently Borlase and Anna were alone, Borlase uttered the truth that lay like poison in both their hearts—generating in his dismay unspeakable, and in hers a whirl of terror far greater than she had ever known or imagined.

'She loves him yet, poor soul!' he said.

Anna nodded. She was beyond trusting herself to speak. Her whole nature was in revolt against her as wicked with a criminal wickedness.

CHAPTER IV

MORE THAN HER FATE, HER DOOM

But Danby and Mrs. Severn had now met.

One day she and the children went over to the Mires to see Scilla's baby, and, after a short visit of adoration on the children's part and toleration on hers, they started home again, toiling up the slippery sides of the hollow with heated faces, for the cottage had been hot and the day was close.

The glory of the moors was now over. The ling was rusty; the bells of the heather, already becoming mummied, shook with a shiver on the breeze. But the tapestry of colour was beautiful and of infinite variety,

from the red of rowans and wild cherries in the gills, the goldening bracken, the deep velvet green of rushes, and the bronze of bilberry-beds, to patches of ash-gray burnt fibre and the hoar lichen of the rocks. It was beautiful in the clear autumn sunshine and the air that blew crisply off Great Whernside, and clearly defined all the mouldings of the hills not only against the sky but against each other as they drifted gradually downwards in far-reaching undulations.

For a while the group of Mrs. Severn and her children were the only signs of life to be seen, the sheep had been driven off for Wonston Fair, and the moors were not yet retenanted. They seemed to move slowly, with a pigmy-like exertion in contrast to the vast area, a section of which they were traversing. But they were accustomed to the moors, and knew well how long it takes to gain the ridge that really seems

near but melts into unexpected lines and hollows at every step. The children were loitering, gathering rush and bracken. Mrs. Severn was a little in advance, walking slowly, carefully picking her way with her eyes down. Thus steadily, her mind bent as carefully upon an unworthy desire and the means of compassing it, as were her steps upon the ling, she advanced to her fate.

They were at the pits, and within half a mile of the plantations when she suddenly looked up. A slight ridge was before them, and over this ridge a man was coming. He wore a light shooting-suit of knickerbockers and short jacket. As he walked he swung a stick. A cigar was between his fingers. She knew him instantly. Her heart stood still. It was Danby.

He had not seen her yet. She was certain of that. Every faculty within her concentrated itself upon the situation and her

advantage. A tense look came into her face, replacing its apathetic dreaminess of a moment before. Every muscle in it seemed to vitalise itself. What had been, not only for weeks and months, but for years, a blank parchment, suddenly started into vivid characters and became human, mortal.

She knew the change in herself. She felt it in every pulse, yes, even more strongly than on the day in the wood. She grasped at concealment, her power seemed to be fleeting by. But her children must not see or guess. She stood still and turned and called them. They were up to her in a moment. She looked only at Antoinette and did not speak, but turned again and allowed her eyes to glance up towards Danby as though she now saw him for the first time. Then she returned to the careful picking of her steps.

'Antoinette,' she said, 'this is Mr. Danby, I must introduce myself to him. You had

better turn off now with the children straight into the woods. I will follow you home.'

She spoke clearly, hoping he would hear her steady voice without the words. Her one fear was that he might swerve and avoid her. There was certainly ample space for him to do so.

But he did not. He had now seen and recognised her. And he came straight on, without a moment's hesitation. The children obeyed instantly, and, after various curious glances that admitted of his judging fairly of their picturesque, half gipsy-like handsomeness, trooped off at a run over a steeper bit of ground. Danby was on the alert. He felt that she had managed to dismiss them.

And now she was looking at him with a smile. As he came near she held out her hand. He looked at her with conventional attention. His face expressed nothing. It had—so to speak—levelled itself, as a piece of land reclaimed for cultivation becomes

uniform. He raised his hat and stood still. He was fully prepared for this moment, had been since the day at Rocozanne and St. Helier's, when Ambrose Piton and Kerr had thrown new lights on old subjects. He had resolved then that when he met her they should speak. He never swerved from a resolution, but was capable of carrying it out in spite of obstacle and misconstruction. After speaking he considered that their future relations would be definitely defined. But this she did not know and was indeed far from guessing.

He knew it, for he saw her delight. To those who had known her all these years it would have seemed nothing short of rapture. Her face was transfigured. She was throwing her all into this supreme moment. He was not slow to read the truth. Here was no actress. For an instant he was morally staggered. Years rolled back and he saw her as he had last seen her on the pier at

Southampton; she had not loved him then as she loved him now. But he recovered himself as quickly.

'How do you do, Mrs. Severn?' he said.

She laughed slightly. He instantly felt that in some way she was off her balance.

'I thought we were never going to meet,' she said.

'No. It was unfortunate that we were out when you called upon my wife,' he said, speaking clearly and slowly. 'I shall accompany her when she returns your call, however. She wants me to know an old manservant of yours. And I suppose Old Lafer is worth seeing. I am seeing all by degrees.'

'We shall be glad to see you, of course. But you will find Elias tiresome and Old Lafer dull. It is very dull.'

She spoke in an uncertain voice, deprecatory, yet sharp. She was trying to fathom his brusqueness. Did he wish to be rude, or was he curt as a means to fortitude? Her

mood was the exact reverse to his. In him there was nothing to fathom, in her there was all, and also the mad conviction that he must be like herself, in a whirl of remembrance and emotion. But she could not but confess that he did not look as though he were. She took a desperate step and threw herself upon his pity.

'Lucius,' she said, her voice suddenly vibrating into a note that excruciated herself, but proved uncontrollable—a note that sharpened itself on a rising sob, 'I must have a kind word from you. I've hungered for it all these years. I have never forgiven myself, never! I spoilt your life. I spoilt my own. It was only because my courage failed. I could not be poor and work for my living. I hated teaching, it even made me hate music. I could not face my life without you. If only you had been near I should never have left you, I could not. But you were so far away. I thought you would

forget me, would love some other, would leave me and I should have to struggle on alone——'

He interrupted her, his voice rising above hers.

'Of what value or use is all this reminiscence?' he said.

She, who for eighteen years had never considered the thought or emotion of another, was now palpitating with anxiety to trace and fathom his. It made her wonderfully beautiful, embued her with kindling life. He knew it, remembering the set paleness of her face in the glimpse he had had of her in the Minster porch. Now she was flushed, and her eyes had dilated and were lustrous and darkly glowing to their depths. Her figure too had gained a relaxed grace; yet its outlines, silhouetted upon this ridge against the sky, were heroic. And her eyes never left his face. Her lips, when she was not speaking, quivered. The soul of her was born at last.

'Lucius,' she said, 'my courage failed; only that, I never lost anything but——'

'Your courage?' he said, holding up his hand to stop her. 'Then you have gained it since. You forget yourself. I spoke just now of my wife.'

'*Forget myself*, yes, for the first time since you left me. *Your wife*. Yes, and my children have just gone home. And I have a husband who is practically your servant. Oh, I know it. I know it all.'

So far he had kept his temper. Now he felt exasperated. He would have walked on, but that he was convinced she would have followed him. He was silent, thinking deeply. Then he resolved that all should be said. He looked up at her again. It was no effort to him to meet the steady gaze of her eyes.

'Mrs. Severn, I never left you.'

'You did, here, in England.'

'I could not have taken you with me.

You knew it and consented to wait. I have nothing on my conscience, nothing, either against you or my wife. I committed no sin against myself between losing you and winning her; do you understand me—no moral sin? Is it conceivable that I should now deliberately sin against my wife? Mrs. Severn, I will have nothing on my conscience still.'

'And I have all—that is what you mean,' she cried with sudden angry passion that convulsed her features. 'You are right. It has gnawed at me. I want to tell you, you must forgive——'

'I do forgive. My wife knows all and will know all, always. I told her myself and shall——'

'*Shall!*'

'Yes.'

'Does she know you saw me in the wood?'

She asked the question sharply. It con-

founded him that she should ask it. He hesitated a moment. A slow smile overspread her face, a smile that robbed her of womanliness.

'She does not know that,' he said. 'Was it worth naming?'

'She would have thought it so. Lucius,' she said, and she came a step nearer, 'she will not know this either.'

He withdrew some paces.

'She will,' he said.

'I don't think so.'

'Then you delude yourself. There were reasons, excellent reasons for my not troubling her with anything so trivial, but this is not trivial. I am deliberately allowing you to make it complete and final.'

She stared at him helplessly. Then she burst into a hysterical laugh, forced and loaded by tears that somehow stifled her, and yet would not flow. Oh, the relief and the appeal that tears would have been!

He looked at her uncompromisingly. His face was suddenly instinct with the sardonic austerity which intercourse with Cynthia had nearly banished. His lowest suspicions of her were reasserting themselves. He could only reflect that in some subtle way she was off her balance, hopelessly so, so far as he was concerned. She had made no impression upon him. His heart was Cynthia's. His whole nature revolted and was steeled against this other by her own deliberate sin of falsity to himself and baseness to her husband, against whom she had committed the cardinal sin of a marriage without affection.

Already he had allowed her to say more than he had intended she should say. But it had been inconceivable that she should say so much. He would say no more than what he now knew was necessary, and which he had long ago resolved upon, should she show herself base.

'Mrs. Severn, we have met to-day as we

shall never meet again,' he said slowly. 'All that there is to regret in the past is on your part. I cannot do more than assure you, you are forgiven; indeed I should have thought my marriage proved that. I must tell you again that my wife knows all. It is only through her intercession, out of respect for his feelings, that your husband does not. Now, I must also tell you that we are both prepared for every one to know; and unless you will consider this as the first and last allusion—privately—to our past relationship to each other, every one shall know as a matter of course. Mrs. Danby and I are agreed——'

He paused. The look on her face was too frightful for any human being to withstand. And she was beautiful, far more beautiful with this tempest of misery sweeping over her, this poignant reproach dilating her eyes, this horror of blank existence impressing itself upon her brain, than any of those in her home knew. He who had known her as a

passionately loving and impulsive girl was not surprised. But for the moment it overcame him utterly. It showed, as clearly as though she had expressed it in words, all that she had hoped for the future from this interview. It showed her as a weak and a wicked woman; but also it showed him what her life here as wife and mother must have been to her, how she must have fed upon the expectation of seeing him again, and how the pent-up love of her being—so unheedingly ignored by her own act years ago—had gathered strength from repression and now possessed her. What could he do? To comfort was impossible. Her look craved a comfort which it was neither in his power to bestow, nor in hers to accept without sin. Yet he could not turn his back upon her, leave her there, in this lonely place alone; Heaven only knew to what mad act he might goad her. He had been too daring; he ought not to have allowed her children to go.

He turned and looked for them, but they had disappeared. There was not a soul to be seen, or any other sign of human habitation than the grotesque timbers and ragged masonry of the pits' shaft outlined blackly against the sky just beyond her. He felt she would faint or fall if he left her thus. But he dare not suggest assistance to her. It seemed to him that she was in some subtle way irresponsible; had passed out of herself so far as self-command went.

'I fear you have been walking too far and have overdone yourself,' he said with less confidence, conscious of the utter lameness and inadequacy of the suggestion. She was past having the sense to take dismissal, or to concentrate the remnants of her dignity upon any fraction of help he could offer towards it. But he was not prepared for the blazing disdain that seemed suddenly to kindle her whole form, and leap from her eyes to pierce his very soul.

'How dare you be so cold to me?' she said. 'I, who am the first woman you ever loved, and whom you loved in your best years with your best love. It's Cynthia Marlowe, she is ice herself, and she has frozen you. That day you saw me in the wood you did not look at me like this. Lucius, it's life and death to me, I must have more from you. That night we parted, you——'

'I kissed you, Clothilde,' he said. 'Yes, and I held you in my arms. You had promised to marry me. I had asked you to be my wife and you promised. You broke your promise. There was never the slightest misunderstanding to make shipwreck of us both, to turn our lives into tragedies, it was your deliberate act that severed us. I loved you and I was a man, and I spoke out to you honourably. Then you were false. You plunged me in one instant from love and pure trust and faith into desolation and bitterness. I lived and worked in that condition

of mind for years, lonely and unloving; and, mind you, it is a thousand times worse for one's moral texture to be unloving than to be unloved. Then I met another woman, and Heaven taught me to trust her, and I found it was Heaven's teaching and not hell's temptation. The hope that I shall make her happy is my dearest hope on earth. I shall tell her all that has passed between us to-day. As for yourself, Clothilde——' he broke off and paused a moment, turning and looking away.

In that instant she said once more,

'Lucius!'

But he did not appear to have heard. He looked at her again with a compassion that thrilled her with awe, even while it pressed out of her heart every remnant of hope by showing her what he was, and what were his motives and aims in life. That look laid an icy touch on her whole being.

'Clothilde,' he said again, 'be content

with what you chose, and do not bring yourself to the brink of damnation. Think of your children, your responsibilities and obligations. If you have in very truth broken your life's soul, try to gather up the fragments, they may make a harmony yet. Reconcile yourself to the fact that if we must meet it can only be through your husband's official connection with us, and do not rob yourself of all possibilities of good. If you do you will also eventually rob your husband and children of their home. Is it likely that if he knew all, he would remain here?'

As he spoke her eyes never left his face. Not only this, but they expressed in a marvellous transparency every thought that his words called up in her soul. He saw that she struggled, that she was breathless. It seemed once or twice that she tried to speak, not for the sake of interruption, but either with assent or contradiction. And he knew that through it all there was a frightful

anguish of yearning in every fibre of her being. He knew that to have embraced her once might have given her an eternal relief, but it would have come on a rushing tide of tears. He dare not even offer his hand.

Moreover, her quietude misled him. What seemed resignation at least, was despair. It was despair that settled upon her face as he stopped. A dead hand seemed to lay itself on her heart and rest there with the whole weight of a dead body. This was more than her fate, it was her doom. Take up the old life again she not only could not but would not.

But she did not faint or fall as he had feared she might. Something in his voice even more than his words controlled her, gave her a strength that was fictitious and still was strength. Her whole mind bent itself energetically and incisively upon the question of what she must do with herself, and how soon she could do it—when, where, how. She stood motionless. Her eyes had

now dropped. There was a curious mixture of the tense and the inert in the droop of her figure. An awful pallor was on her face. Her lips, firmly drawn together, assuredly quivered and yet suggested marble.

He thought she was passing through a torturing inward struggle. He did not know that all the shades of feeling fleeting over her face were like those involuntary convulsions that often distort the features in the last moments of life. She felt that her body was dead. She could drag it along, that was all. Her heart had not ceased to beat, but it too was dead, leaden. Nothing was left to her control or to control her, except her mind. She could still think and reason to one end. That was clear to her.

So long as she stood, he stood. He was conscious of a moment's weakness in the prayer that she might not be betrayed into tears. But she did not look up again. She suddenly walked on, passing close to him as though he were not there.

And he too pursued his way. In half an hour he was at the Mires; his object in walking to-day being to see the alteration made by the removal of the old dilapidated buildings. Cynthia had proposed to come with him, but he, remembering the miserable incident of their last walk here, had begged her to stay at home. He would not run the risk of her again meeting Hartas Kendrew. All was so silent at the pits, and looked so unutterably desolate, that it never occurred either to Mrs. Severn or himself that some of the men might be at work.

But no sooner had he disappeared than Hartas Kendrew came forth from behind the wall that sheltered the shaft, and, standing upon the patch of closely-cropped grass, where the carts stood in loading, looked down the moor towards the woods.

Mrs. Severn was walking slowly. He followed her.

CHAPTER V

HARTAS ATTEMPTS TO RIGHT WRONGS

Two hours later he was at home again.

He came in and took no notice of Scilla, who sat still pale and with a white shawl over her shoulders at one end of the settle with her baby on her lap. Passing through into the scullery he took up the hand-basin, and, filling it with hot water, went out into the yard for a wash at the pump. When he returned with his shirt open at the collar he was free from coal-dust, and, sitting down on the first seat that came in his way, he kicked off his boots before going upstairs. A little

later he reappeared washed, combed, and in his Sunday suit.

By this time Scilla was certain he was going out; but she expected he would go at once. He generally tidied himself in this way when he went down into Wonston to spend an evening with the Brockells. She was very much surprised when he sat down at the table and opened one of the drawers. He took out the rarely-used penny ink-bottle and a rusty fine-nibbed pen. By this time she was interested, and sat watching him intently. And now he drew from his breast-pocket an old worn leather case, and took from it a sheet of note-paper half covered with pencilled writing, and a blank sheet and envelope, the former folded in letter form. He smoothed it straight, and laboriously filled one page with crabbed stiff characters, then enclosing the other letter within it, put them into the envelope and addressed it.

As he finished he looked up at Scilla.

Her eyes were fixed upon him with startled and suspicious inquiry.

'Damn you, Priscilla, can't you look t' other way?' he said.

'What are you doing, father?' she said in a low voice.

'Minding my own business and makking t' best o' my opportunities.'

'I can see the writing on that envelope.'

'D'ye think I'd hev sat here if I'd meant you shouldn't? You must reckon me a precious numskull to put my faith on a woman's honesty. Light eyes they hev for t' main chance everywhere. Now, see thee, Priscilla, read it straight. As sure's my name's Hartas Kendrew this here letter goes to young Madam at t' Hall. And there's another inside o't. And them two letters 'll pay off my old grudges against t' Admiral and her, and 'll raise sike a talk i' t' country-side as 'll fair drive some folk out of it. I'm fair converted, Priscilla, I believe now i' a Provi-

dence that rights wrongs, and 'll see that rich as well as poor hev their deserts.'

'I don't believe you,' said Scilla, sitting forward, while a delicate flush rose in either cheek. 'You have no power to hurt her. I'm fair certain of it. You may think you have, your reasoning's all crooked. Providence is a deal more likely to confound you nor her.'

'But I tell you I hev t' power. Sike a story as I could tell thee! But I'll keep it to mysel until I've posted this and been to Old Lafer and come home again. Then, if you and Kit like to bide up for me, you shall hear t' truth, and a mighty deal o' shame and sin there is——'

'What has Old Lafer to do with it? No one there 'll be pleased to see you.'

Hartas chuckled.

'That they won't. I can answer for't. You've hit t' right nail for once, Priscilla. Well, you may laugh, but it's gospel truth. But there's Madam there—ah! 'tis a mucky

pool—d'ye think I'd hev kept quiet as I hev ower her and her ways, Clo, old Clo,bad——'

'Father!' Scilla cried sharply at this refrain that she loathed.

'If I'd none meant to make grist o't sometime,' Hartas went on imperturbably. 'And now t' time's ripe. Ay, it is, Priscilla. I'm away to put this here letter into Wonston post-office, then I'm going to hev a crack wi' Luke Brockell and then wi' t' Canon, Canon Tremenheere, and then I'll hev a sup o' hot sperrit and watter at t' Public at East Lafer to hie me up t' hill to Old Lafer, and there I'll hev a crack wi' t' master, or failing him, wi' Lias and Dinah Constantine, and then I'll come back and tell t' whole story to Kit and you. And to-morrow morn when t' post reaches t' Hall young Madam 'll ken it too, and a pretty taking she'll be in.'

Scilla stared helplessly, convinced, however, that he was either not in his right mind,

or had already had some drink. He was standing now, leaning against the table, and from time to time flourishing the letter before her eyes and rapidly withdrawing it. Supposing that he was right, that he had the power of which he boasted, this action was childish, spiteful. She bore it until she could bear it no longer. Then she started up, and holding her baby on one arm, made a wild clutch with the other hand on the letter. She would have torn it into shreds and thrown it in the fire. But her fingers closed on empty air. Hartas threw up his arm high above her head, and backed to the door, leering at her. She saw he had purposely tempted her to this. Her spirit rose, colour now flaming in her face. But for her baby she would have followed him and made another attempt, but, hampered as she was, she could not. She sank down again on the settle and looked away from him, gazing into the fire, and striving to still the furious beat-

ing of her heart, and to soothe her uneasy misgivings.

Hartas still lingered. Surely, had he really meant to do all he said, he would have hastened. It struck her that she might at least help to detain him, to give him less time should he start at last.

'I don't think Mrs. Danby 'll ever open sike a letter as that,' she said with an air of indifference. 'It looks a deal too common. She sent me some letters when Kit wer ill about what he wer to eat, and they were grand letters with colours and a little sort of picture where she closed it, her crest, Kit called it, maybe because of the bright red in it that wer like a cock's. If anybody pays any heed to that letter, father, depend upon it it'll be Mr. Danby or Mr. Severn, to spare her business.'

'Nowt o' t' sort,' said Hartas. 'She minds her own business. D'ye think I've helped to lead stuff for t' old brig, and made free wi'

t' masons and carpenters i' t' yards and sheds at t' Hall, and cracked wi' this servant and t' other, without picking up my crumbs o' knowledge o' her and her ways. No man can hev it i' his mind to spring a mine under another human cretur's steps and none mek his plans and carry 'em out.'

'But she was not at home when the old brig was finished.'

'No more she wer. But if she had t' ordering of it all, ay, even to t' leaving up o' that damned board t' Admiral put up i' warning, I'd a bit o' management i' my mind too. There's no need for that board now t' brig's so wide, it's been left up to insult me, Priscilla, ay, it has,' he repeated angrily as she laughed with a merriment that was half hysterical. 'But it's none me that stands i' need o' sike preaching. I ken why Mrs. Severn's got into t' way o' walking at last after all these years, and how lal she did it when Mr. Danby wer off and why she does

it again now. I've tracked her and seen her skiming about, and now I've seen her meet him. And I saw Mr. and Mrs. Danby come home frev their honeymoon i' their fine carriage and pair. I wer on t' road between t' brig and t' park gates when they came rolling along. And she wer smiling at him and he back at her, and they didn't see me as they passed for looking at each other, but she looked back at t' brig and then she did and she nodded quite friendly-like. And I said to mysel, "Damn you if I don't find a way to put out yer smile!" And now t' time's come, I tell you, Priscilla, and I'm off. You can tell Kit just as much as you like. I'll tell all when I'm back to-night.'

He opened the door and disappeared, closing it behind him. Scilla got up and went to the window, and watched him as he walked along the edge of the marsh whose water was now beginning to rise from the rains that had already swept over the hills up

west. He carried a stick, and stopped now and then to prod it into the ooze. Then he began to climb the 'slape' sides of the hollow, and in a few moments reached the top. Here he paused, standing on the edge and looking back, a squat uncouth figure whose face of diabolical intent she could see in her mind's eye as clearly as though it were still before her. He looked down at the cottages that clustered together in peaceful order free now from dilapidation and ruin, the ground beyond scarred with limy refuse and a few heaps of stones too small to have been worth removal. Where the water wandered away from the hollow, the ling encroached on the shale and rush. Above stretched the inverted hollow of the sky of a uniform gray, cloudless and sombre. Against it there wavered a few drifts of smoke from the cottage chimneys as the fires were stirred for tea. No one was visible. A hawk, poised above the ling, motionless, was the only sign of life. As he

turned and walked on again it swooped down upon its prey. Scilla saw it. It flashed into her mind that if, by any possibility, what he said was true, he was like that hawk. She raised her baby on her arm with a sigh.

'Eh dear,' she said aloud. 'How happy Kit and baby and I would be without him.'

Hartas reached Wonston as dusk fell. It brought with it a few splashes of rain on a wind that came round the corners in gusts and wetted the pavements sufficiently to reflect the gas-lights that were just being lit along the streets. He passed the post-office on his way towards the Minster and dropped his letter into it without a moment's hesitation. The clock struck five as he crossed the Close. Evensong was just over, he heard the organ pealing within the grand old building that loomed in massive outlines against the dusk; a thin thread of worshippers was filtering through the west door, pausing on the steps to look at the sky and the pavement, and to

put up their umbrellas. Their appearance made him loiter a little. He did not know much of Canon Tremenheere, and had a vague impression that as a clergyman he must be associated with this service. He might not have got home yet and he wanted to find him in. He felt that if kept waiting his courage might evaporate. He stood against the railings and watched. It was a stranger in white surplice and scarlet hood, preceded by an official, whom he saw cross to the Deanery. Two other clergymen followed, stood talking a moment and separated. But he knew neither. He went slowly on to Tremenheere's. But Tremenheere was out.

'I'll wait a bit,' said Hartas, preparing to walk in.

But the servant repulsed him.

'It's no manner of use your doing that,' she said. 'His sister's here, Mrs. Kerr, and her husband, and they're at Lady Lavinia Russell's and 'll go on to Lafer Hall for

dinner. You can come again to-morrow if your business is that particular.'

Hartas stared, swore at her, and turning, plodded forth again into the increasing darkness. He had not calculated on being baulked in any of his plans, and this disappointment determined him instantly to run as little risk as possible of missing Mr. Severn. To tell his tale to the Canon with an affectation of abhorrence and regret was nothing compared to telling it to Mr. Severn with gloating triumph. If he had to wait till midnight he would tell it at Old Lafer. He had only to cross the moor afterwards from the woods to the Mires; there was a moon, he could do it safely. He gave up the intention of having a gossip with Luke Brockell. He had also had to give up his nefarious partnership with him on Kit's return home. Kit's suspicions had been aroused by some trifling circumstance, and a severe cross-examination had convinced Hartas that he was suspected, and

that he did not care to be, by Kit. But Luke and he had trenched on more dangerous subjects over their glasses of spirits; and Mrs. Severn's letter to Danby was a secret of Luke's as well as of his. Both meant to make money by it. It was often expedient to purchase silence.

So Hartas passed through the town again and out into the East Lafer lanes. The traffic of the day was over. He met no one. Rain was falling more steadily now, and from time to time his weather-trained ear caught a sough over the distant moors that foretold rough days. The equinoctials were due. Tempest would soon clutch the hills; gale-driven clouds would fill the torrent courses and smoke in the hollows and fly over the ridges.

He traversed the village; the geese were asleep on the green, here and there a twinkle of light showed through a crack or a crevice in the shuttered windows; the graveyard

round the little chapel-of-ease looked grim and dreary. He lifted his head and looked closely at it.

'Tis none canny to think on,' he thought. 'I'd liefer walk as lie for many a day yet, and so I shall, and so I shall, ay, ay.'

But suddenly he felt chill and craven. He shook himself, and having passed, forced himself to stand and look back. But a horror started into his soul. The gravestones had faced him as he approached. He was convinced they faced him still, had turned and were staring at him. He swore an oath aloud. His voice shook and was scarcely audible. Panic seized him. He stumbled on, feeling as though his feet were fettered and the gravestones were still near, following him. He would never reach Old Lafer if he felt so strange as he felt now. Was he going to have a fit? Was a judgment at hand? What was judgment? Why need he fear

it? Was it not in his hands to mete out to others? *Judgment?* The word rang in his ears, suffused his brain, paralysed his faculties.

Here was the Public! Drink he must have to steady his nerve and nerve his determination. But he must also keep sober. If Dinah Constantine saw that he was in liquor he knew no power on earth would admit him to the Old Lafer kitchen, or persuade her to summon her master.

He hit upon a happy expedient. He would have one good, hot, strong glass now, and he would buy a bottle to take home with him. Then, if this were illness that was seizing him, he could fortify himself in the woods, on the moors, where he liked. He swore at himself as an infernal coward. Then he dubbed himself a foolhardy devil. Surely the parsons would say more courage was needed to go to death drunk than sober!

Powers of Hell, thought Hartas, and so thinking he stumbled into the Inn, and sitting down, took off his hat and wiped great beads of clammy-cold perspiration from his brow.

But he went out again sober, though with a dancing fire in his veins that fixed his thoughts on the delights that lay in the bottle under his arm.

And there he saw the lights at Old Lafer twinkling on the hillside opposite. His journey's end was near.

'I reckon it won't tak long to send Mistress Severn to perdition now,' he thought. He twined his fingers lovingly round the bottle as though he could squeeze its essence thus into blood and brain.

'She'll gang *this* way, short, sharp and sure,' he thought again, and a little later he said aloud:

'Her turn first, mine last. Same way for both on us, rich and poor, and all o' our own

makking. Her and me i' t' same track, t' broad road. Damnation at t' end.'

After this both speech and thought were sluggish, until he found himself knocking at the back door at Old Lafer with a deafening barking of dogs in his ears.

CHAPTER VI

'VENGEANCE IS MINE'

DINAH opened it. She held a lighted candle that flared backwards on the wind, and threw a flickering glare on his face.

'You!' she said. 'And what do you want, Hartas Kendrew?'

Her voice was more severe than surprised, although surprise was foremost in her thoughts.

'I want your master,' said Hartas.

'And what do you need o' him, and why do you come here? This is none t' place where he does business; he'd never hev rest if he encouraged folk to come here as well as to t' offices at t' Hall and i' Wonston. Wait

till morning, and then tak your trouble to t' proper place.'

'I've no trouble, woman. T' trouble's his. You'd best let me in.'

'What's that you've gotten under your arm?'

'A bottle o' gin, a full bottle, Mrs. Constantine. Not a drop gone. See!'

He held it up against the light. She saw the sealing-wax was unbroken.

'There was more where that came from,' she said.

'I'll none deny it,' said Hartas in his most wheedling tone. 'A drop o' comfort we must all hev sometimes, as I daresay you ken i' this house, leastways one or more o' you will. Now, just let me in, and tell your master I must see him partickler,' he added hastily as a gloomy look of distrust crossed her face. He had not yet ventured to raise a foot towards the upper step, feeling instinctively that to attempt to encroach without free leave

would be the sure means of having the door shut, with a command to make the best of his way home.

'Is your business long?' said Dinah. She generally sent visitors of this description to the right-about at once. But her very fear and distrust of Hartas, and her uncertainty as to how much he knew or guessed of Mrs. Severn's habits, disposed her to parley, with a view to yielding as the more discreet course for Mr. Severn's sake.

'It'll be as long as he chooses to mak it,' said Hartas.

'Well, he's nobbut been in more'n a few minutes,' said Dinah reluctantly. 'You can sit down i' Elias's rocker and wait while he's had his meal. I'll tell him you're here. He's that kind-hearted he'd never hev me turn no one away. And it'll be rough weather to-morrow, t' start o' a spell maybe. Come your ways in.'

She closed the door, and preceded him to

the hearth, pulling the rocking-chair round to face the fire which she stirred into flame by one vigorous poke into the midst of the turves. Then she went to the parlour. He knew when the door was opened by the merry chatter of children's voices that burst forth, and for a moment was hushed while Dinah delivered her message. She came back, saying Mr. Severn would see him. If Hartas felt like a Judas at that moment he took care not to show it.

'This wind meks us wish we'd Miss Anna home,' said Dinah, as a sudden blast rushed round the house, rattling the window and sending a puff of smoke down the chimney. 'She's away, across t' seas. She's managed ill none to be safe housed again before t' autumn gales. Mr. Borlase is i' Jersey too, so she'll none be i' t' mind to hurry.'

'And where's your mistress?' said Hartas.

'She's where she allus is, at home.'

'She none gangs gadding off visiting?'

'Not she. 'She's no friends to gang to.'

'So she meks up for't by walking ower t' country-side.'

'She does walk a deal now, and a good thing too.'

'Does she gang alone?'

'Off and on. Most oft she starts wi' t' childer, and then sends 'em back i' Miss Netta's care. Antoinette's going to be Anna ower again.'

'They were all ower at t' Mires to-day.'

'Ay, they were, to see Priscilla's little 'un; Miss Emmeline says 'tis a bonny brat,' said Dinah sharply.

'And Mistress Severn sent 'em home again.'

'Ay, she did. They met Mr. Danby, and he and she had a talk. 'Twere natural as I telled 'em when they came back first.'

'I saw 'em at it.'

'Then where were you?' said Dinah.

'I wer on t' moor. Mrs. Constantine, has

it ever come into your mind that your mistress has some sort o' a twist and needs an eye kept on her; might do hersel some harm—you ken what I mean?'

He winked and distorted his mouth into a knowing leer.

Dinah was struck by the tone more than the suggestion. She was busy at the table with her back to him, and now turned with a glance of keen resentful scrutiny. It went sorely against the grain with her to be indebted to Hartas Kendrew for any information. Nevertheless it might be expedient that she should be for her master's sake.

'Now, Hartas,' she said, 'tell me squarely why you think so.'

'Why, I wer coming her way and I just followed her to-day.'

'You followed her. Did she ken?'

'Nay. She never looked round, never so much as skimed ower her shoulder. There wer sommat i' her look and ways that made

me think after a bit it might be best to see her safe home.'

'Did she gang slow?'

'Ay. Creepy-like.'

'But she came straight home?'

'Nay, that's just what she didn't do, and what I wer certain sure she wouldn't.'

She was exasperated by his tone of triumph and air of superior knowledge; but not for one moment did she associate the whole object of his visit with this knowledge.

'Then what did she do?' she said, coming up to the hearth.

'She went straight as far as t' woods, and then turned off, upwards to that pool, Brockell's Pool, ye ken, where Luke's cousin wer drowned.'

'Well?'

'Ay, she did. And thinks I, as soon as ever she turned off, "She kens that pool." There wer sommat i' her look that made me certain sure. T' only thing she'd takken

any notice of wer t' watter. When she came i' sight o' t' beck, she stopped and looked at it, thoughtful-like; she wer studying hard. Then she went up t' gill, instead o' down to t' lal brig, ower into your meadows. Not but what she could hev crossed t' watter anywhere she'd wished, what wi' t' rocks and none much more nor a summer sup yet. But she never framed to cross. I wer spying through t' trees. She just turned and went straight up t' gill, striking t' lal track there is, and then she came to Brockell's Pool.'

'Well,' said Dinah impatiently, 'look sharp, can't you? T' parlour bell 'll ring i' now, and Peggy's putting Jack and babby to bed.'

'Ay, to Brockell's Pool,' Hartas repeated in his most leisurely manner. 'She stood and looked at it where she couldn't hev gone in. Then she mustered up courage and went round to t' rock that shelves away

down into it, and there she stood again, wi' her feet all but i' t' watter. I thought she'd hev stepped out; she'd hev been gone in a minute if she had. But she just said sommat out loud and seemed to shiver like. And then, damn me, she turned her back upon it and walked away; ay, damn me she did, down t' gill t' way she'd come up. Her face wer like a corp. 'Twer t' first sight I had o' it, and it fair turned my blood. But t' game wer up for that hour. She never stopped again. When she came to t' brig she crossed it and went straight up t' meadows, and I saw her step ower t' stile on to t' flags and there were her childer.'

He stopped, looking askance at her. She said nothing, and returning to the table she again turned her back upon him.

'Is *she* i' t' parlour too?' said Hartas, jerking his head and thumb in that direction.

'She's upstairs, i' her own chamber,' said Dinah shortly.

'Came in knocked up, did she?'

'She did that. Miss Emmeline took her her tea.'

'And she's eaten, eh?'

'Nay, not she. I wish Miss Anna wer back, I do.'

'Well, well, I shan't be long wi' t' master, Mrs. Constantine,' said Hartas soothingly. 'And I daresay you'll ken what my business has been, all i' good time, i' good time.'

'Bless me, I don't want to ken. Don't you get it into your mind that I do, Hartas Kendrew,' cried Dinah sharply. 'You be mum about all this fancy o' yours,' she added hastily, as the click of the back-door latch was heard, succeeded by the rattle of milk-can handles as Elias came in and set the full pails down upon the floor. And before there was time for another word the parlour bell rang.

At the same moment Antoinette was heard running upstairs, and singing as she

went in a fresh sweet voice that filled the house with melody. Could Hartas have seen her he would have seen a vision of beauty that might have softened some of the rancour in his remorseless old heart—a girl, tall and slender, with a figure as pliant as a willow in the breeze; and a face of soft dusky tinting, through which the healthy blood showed in peach-like bloom; eyes large, dark, and bright; chiselled features; and brown hair rolled off her brow and coiled above it in a mass, wherein a red butterfly in the shape of a bit of knotted ribbon had alighted. Her white dress with its loose garibaldi gleamed against the dark oak panelling of the staircase. And Emmeline followed, pausing, as Dinah came into the passage, to hang over the banisters and say:

'Dinah, Hartas has to go into the parlour when tea's cleared, and we're going up to the nursery until he's done with father. Joan's saying her prayers to father now.'

Yes, Joan, too sturdily built a little maiden to grow quickly and spring up out of all knowledge of old friends as Antoinette and Emmeline had done, was kneeling by the side of her father's arm-chair. Her hands were clasped. His were on her head, and as she spoke she looked straight at him. She was just finishing with the usual hymn, one they had all said in turn to him or Anna, and still said in their hearts—

'Gentle Jesus, meek and mild, look upon a little child,
Pity my simplicity, give me grace to come to Thee.'

Then she sprang up, threw her arms round his neck and kissed him good-night. Mr. Severn rose immediately afterwards and went to the corner where the secretaire stood at which he always transacted such small matters of business as reached him at Old Lafer. He opened it, sat down, and told Dinah to place the lamp where the light was thrown upon his papers. By this arrangement he remained in the shadow, preferring

it as less dazzling to the eyes. He occupied himself during the next few moments in counting some small items of payments on the Lafer estate received that day, placing the cash, amounting to about twenty pounds, in a leather bag which often held such temporarily in this secretaire. He was just twisting the tape round its mouth when Hartas was shown into the room by Dinah. As she closed the door she saw that he turned half round on his chair and heard him say in his usual hearty voice,

'Well, Kendrew, and what can I do for you?'

She went back to the kitchen and resumed her work. Elias had gone out again to fodder the cows and rub down Mr. Severn's horse. For about half an hour there was perfect silence in the house. Antoinette had evidently ceased to sing, or she could have heard her by snatches from the nursery. The gale, increasing fitfully, rushed round

the house, soughing in the larches, whistling among the buildings. Splashes of rain dimmed the window through which she could faintly see the glimmer of Elias's lantern as he moved about at his work.

She was just beginning to think that Hartas's business must have been important, since it involved so much longer a time than the five minutes generally accorded to men at Old Lafer, when she heard a fumbling step in the passage. Then a hand was cautiously passed over the outside surface of the kitchen door. It struck her that there was no lamp in the hall. This must be Hartas trying to find the handle. She turned it for him. He came in. His hat was on and jammed low over his eyes; had she wished to scrutinise his face she could not have distinguished a single feature. His stick and the bottle of gin were on the dresser. He made straight for them, and as he took them up he said thickly,

'T' master wants you, Mrs. Constantine.'

'Why, t' bell's never rung,' Dinah exclaimed.

He did not answer. For the first time it flashed into her mind that all this was strange, that something was wrong. She looked sharply at him. So far as she could see he was imperturbable. Moreover if Mr. Severn wanted her, her duty was in the parlour. She went there quickly, prompted by an instinctive suspicion of some catastrophe.

Apparently all was as she left it, except that the chair Hartas had occupied was pushed askew between the table and the fire. But her swift glance round showed her more than this. It showed her Mr. Severn, still sitting at the secretaire, but with his arms flung out and his face buried on them.

And now she knew something terrible had happened.

She went and touched him on the shoulder.

'Master, what's come to you?' she said.

He raised himself and looked at her.

At the appalling misery of that look Dinah shrank back, heartsick. And then tears rushed into her eyes, and seeing him only as a blurred vision she drew near again, and again laid her hand upon him.

'Tell me what t' trouble is,' she said, striving to steady her voice. 'Come, Master, you ken me well. You ken I'm to be trusted. What's come to you now? May God Almighty help us all to bear and forbear.'

'Oh, Dinah!' he said.

Even the voice was not his own. She saw that he was stricken to the very core of his nature. There were sobs in his throat, she was certain of it. As for the livid pallor of his face, she had seen nothing like it except on a corpse.

Again she urged him to relieve his mind, and thus the tension on every faculty and

nerve. She was convinced that if he had sent for her, it was with this intention.

'Did you send for me?' she asked.

He made a motion of assent. Then, after a few more moments of deep silence, he seemed to gather self-control sufficient to steady himself for speech. He spoke, too, deliberately. It seemed to her that he must have been sunk in silent thought during half the time of Hartas's presence in the room. What he said was so preconcerted, so uncompromising, and admitted of no appeal, from the obvious determination to listen to none.

In a few rapid steady words he gave her the gist of Hartas Kendrew's communication to himself. Astounding and terrible though that was, it did not convey half the horror of his manner of repeating it. That was icy, almost profane in a man whose domestic affections she knew to have been of the tenderest and sincerest character. Of the wife he had worshipped, he now spoke as

though she were a thing of tow and wax. The loose satire of the very tone in which he uttered the words 'my wife,' seemed to Dinah to be rank blasphemy on his lips. But how could she reprove him? In what other terms or tones did she deserve to be spoken of, if all were true?

She grasped at that 'if.'

'Master,' she said, 'is Hartas Kendrew's word good for aught? He's none an honest man. He has a spite against us all, more nor less, what wi' t' poaching and manslaughter case and t' prison for Kit. And then there were that tale of t' poor old screw o' a horse that he took to Northside Edge sale for Luke Brockell's trolly. He has poison i' his heart for all t' Marlowes, and this hurts 'em through you. It may be some trumped-up story that daylight 'll show to be as full o' holes as a sieve.'

'And who must I go to for the truth, Dinah?' he asked.

This had not occurred to her.

'Can I go to Mr. Danby,' he said.

She shook her head.

'It is more likely that Mrs. Danby should come to my wife, and to my wife I must go. I must take her by surprise, then perhaps she will betray herself. I who have been a subterfuge for twenty years must take to a subterfuge myself now.' He added this more to himself than to any listener.

'Dinah,' he went on suddenly, 'to-morrow I have to go off by rail on business with Mr. Danby. He will have to leave the Hall before the letters arrive. I shall keep the engagement. He will not know that I know anything. But because I do, I must see her—my wife, to-night'—he paused, drew a deep breath, and went on less hurriedly. 'I will not go up to her. She shall come down to me here. Dinah, you are my witness before God, if this thing be true, I will never willingly see her again.'

He stopped again, pushed his chair back, and got up. But his limbs seemed to fail him. He tottered, clutched at the table for support, and sank down, trembling.

'Do you know what it all means?' he cried in a tone of vibrating uncontrollable agitation. 'It means that I lose my work, my children's home, our means of livelihood, that we shall be straitened at every point, that Mrs. Danby loses her faith in her husband, and with that her happiness, that——'

But Dinah broke in here.

'I'll none believe he's played her false,' she said.

'Not! What less has he done?'

'A deal less!' then, perceiving that to urge this was to cover Mrs. Severn with still deeper infamy, she hesitated, stammered, and became silent.

'What were you going to say? Tell me,' he said with gentle indifference of impartiality.

She had remembered that Hartas inferred

that Mrs. Severn had been on the point of destroying herself. It struck her that if Mr. Danby had responded to her as Hartas represented to Mr. Severn, there would have been neither sense in nor reason for her doing so. This she explained. He saw the justification of it, and smiled without remark upon the awful possibility as to Mrs. Severn's despair, which it suggested.

But to Dinah that smile was intolerable. Either it was too sad or too sardonic. It was wholly foreign to his best nature. Indeed he seemed to her distorted and almost irresponsible. She could not enter into the necessity of bringing Mrs. Severn downstairs. Her active woman's mind foresaw the difficulty of making her rise and dress, of keeping the children in ignorance of the cruel crisis, the unnatural position of their father and mother towards each other, the shattering of time-tried ties, the utter ruin of their home. She shrank from it all. Could no means be

devised for deferring a fatal rupture, the final step on which he had determined? She saw none but that of honest heart-felt pleading. Yes, he must have the truth from Mrs. Severn at once. She could not gainsay that. To urge him to join her as usual was to violate her own sense of the sacredness of the marriage vow. But would he not go to her and question her quietly? What would Miss Antoinette or Miss Emmeline think if they heard or saw? And would he not unsay that sentence of separation, at least allow the worst to wait until Miss Anna could get home, until they knew what Mrs. Danby would do, what Hartas might be made to retract, what Mr. Danby would take his oath upon? But first and foremost, for the children's sake, surely he would forego the stern justice of his resolution and be merciful.

All this she pleaded in her homely words, but from the bottom of her heart. He knew her sound sense and her faithfulness. He re-

cognised the keen judgment that weighted her reasoning. He sat for some time silent again, with that look of torturingly close thought furrowing his face into the lines and wrinkles of age, seaming it with care, imprinting it with an anguished grief that would last until death.

Dinah stood and watched him, following, with the dogged constancy of a self-respecting woman whose essence of life lay in the knowledge that she was loved and trusted, every varying shade of expression that crossed his face. She harvested some and rejected others, according as they worked for or against her. The strain on both minds was intense. He was facing the worst. She shrank from it as from a gulf that knew no light or air.

At last she took a step towards him, her keen bright eyes lit with a sudden confidence.

'Well?' she said.

He glanced up at her, hesitating still.

But that gleam of confidence disarmed him.

'I think you are right, Dinah,' he said.

'Ay, I am, for t' children's sake,' she said.

CHAPTER VII

HEART-BREAK AND GUILT

During all this time Dinah had been in fear of Antoinette or Emmeline coming downstairs and into the parlour. She knew that so far as explanations could be given to them at present, it would fall to her lot to give them. Mr. Severn was in no condition to see them. If they saw him as he now looked, they must know that some terrible grief had fallen upon him. It wrung Dinah's heart to see him. Not only hopelessness but bitterness was generated now.

She went upstairs, and met the girls just coming out of the nursery. Peggy was still

there, tidying away the bath, and folding the children's clothes, so she beckoned them across to their own room.

'Don't go down to your father again to-night,' she said. 'He's a bit worried, my honeys, and 'll be best alone. I've just been in to him.'

'That wretched old Hartas, I suppose. What a time he stayed!' said Antoinette.

'Ay, 'twer Hartas. I'm that sorry I let him in. Ower and ower again I've vowed I'd never let another fash him wi' business here. I'm nowt but a muddling old fool at t' best.'

'Oh, Dinah, we all know you're not that. But what can we do? Of course we'll sit over the nursery fire until bed-time—but father, couldn't I go and ask if I can do anything for him? Sometimes he'll get me to write or copy a letter.'

'There's nowt o' that kind to do to-night,' said Dinah, shaking her head, and scarcely daring to look at these bright young faces

lest the mournful wistfulness of her own eyes should throw its shadow over them already.

'And we mustn't wish him good-night? Well, I'll get up early and have breakfast with him. He has a journey to-morrow.'

Dinah said nothing. She knew that early rising was not a forte of theirs, and especially on dark mornings, when they rarely awoke without being called. If by chance Antoinette did come down, there would be no time for conversation or observation.

'Hev you been i' to your mother's chamber?' she asked.

'Yes,' said Emmeline, 'she wasn't asleep, not really, but she seemed drowsy. She wouldn't have anything.'

Antoinette blushed, looking for an instant at Dinah with an imploring appeal against any remark being made. This condition, so innocently described by Emmeline, was precisely that of which Anna had had to explain the reason before, by leaving home to go to

Rocozanne, she dared leave Mrs. Severn in Antoinette's care. That blush was pain and shame to her.

'Well, then, Peggy 'll bring your milk and cake into t' nursery, and then you'll just gang——'

'Why, here's father!' Emmeline exclaimed. She had caught the sound of a creaking board on the stairs, and looking beyond Dinah, saw Mr. Severn. He was walking slowly, holding the banisters at every step. His head was sunk on his breast. He carried the lamp. They all saw that his hand shook by the unsteadiness of the flame, where there was no draught that could penetrate the glass. Involuntarily they ceased talking. Dinah made a wild effort to draw them within the room. But she was too late. He looked up. The light shone full on his face, showing its gray ghastliness and new look of drawn age and hopelessness.

'Father,' cried Emmeline sharply, 'what's the matter? Are you ill?'

She ran to him, staring at him in sheer alarm.

He stopped a moment.

'My little Emmy,' he said in a tone of the fondest affection.

To her dying day Emmeline never could recall that moment or that tone without tears starting to her eyes and throat. She was now too awed to move. Her first longing to throw herself upon his breast and weep died within her. She stood aside and he passed on.

Dinah thought he was going to his wife. But he was not. He went farther, to Anna's room.

'Oh, Dinah,' said Antoinette, feeling herself blanched and shivering, 'what has happened? Whatever is the matter?'

'We must hev Miss Anna home. God Almighty help us all!' said Dinah in a

shaken voice. She could not look at them. Throwing her apron over her head, she sank on to a chair and wept uncontrollably. Every moment the situation seemed to her more terrible. Former shame dwindled to nothing —its results were not public and far-reaching. But this, with Hartas Kendrew on the track, was odious, and not to be escaped from. Should Mr. Severn separate from his wife there would be open scandal and disgrace, and their children must know. There was no knowing what a day might bring forth, what might happen even before Anna could get home. But she must be sent for at once. They all felt the want of her. Antoinette and Emmeline were vaguely sanguine that all would be right again when she returned. Dinah knew only that she had happy modes of comfort, and that if any one could heal a breach, she could. But her heart sank. She feared that even her healing powers would not avail now. She was powerless to imagine

the future, to readjust and gather up the fragments of the old happy life at Old Lafer. She could neither transplant nor re-root its broken fibres. To-day was bad enough. She dreaded to-morrow with an unspeakable dread.

When the girls returned to the nursery she went downstairs. She had not been able to force herself to go to Mrs. Severn. She had never felt towards any one as she was now feeling towards her. Her mind was in a tumult of wrath and abhorrence. She did not know what to do. She felt herself unable to cope with the emergency; for once she was inefficient and irresolute. She would not shut herself into the kitchen. No one should think she was already telling Elias what had happened. No! not even Elias, her own husband, should know to-night. He generally went to bed early, before she did; all her anxiety was that he should to-night, and leave her to follow her own devices for Mr. Severn.

She wondered why Mr. Severn had gone into Anna's room. Her housewifely thoughts had flown to its disused condition, its turned-back carpets and unsheeted bed. Surely he was not meaning to sleep there. She wandered into the parlour. The secretaire was still open, thus she was convinced he meant to come down again. Could he have been intending to go to his wife's room, and finding himself seen by Antoinette and Emmeline, have desisted, and passed on under a pretence of some other purpose? Dinah had never known him pretend anything, or even feign what was not the strict truth, and she could not now believe that he would, that any emergency would compel him to it. She hovered about in the passage, looking up the stairs, listening, longing, yet fearing to venture up to him. Once a slight sound reached her; she thought it was in the nursery. But it was not. He had dropped a book. He had gone to Anna's room with a definite pur-

pose. Hartas had named the finding of the letter as being in a book which Scilla believed was Miss Hugo's, and had taken back to Old Lafer and given to Dinah. He concluded it would now be on Anna's bookshelves. If he found it, and in it the words Hartas described, it would in his opinion confirm everything. The book was not difficult to recognise, and on the first page on which he opened he saw the name which up to that moment he hoped, and well-nigh believed, he should not see—*Lucius Danby*, in his wife's handwriting. The shock of this confirmation was so great that the book slipped from his fingers as though it burnt them. Clothilde had been mad, reckless! He dare not trust himself with her. He felt that his passion might be violent and terrify her. The childish carelessness with which she had handled her weapons exasperated and shocked him beyond description. To have put a book and a sheet of paper to such uses

and forgotten or lost them was but another proof of her irresponsibility. He saw it all now—how one thing had led to another, how the first sin of her loveless marriage had fructified the seeds of evil in her nature and led to one lapse after another. During the whole of that night, while he paced up and down the parlour, sleepless, or sat down in his arm-chair with an overwhelming feeling of utter exhaustion, staring into the fire in a chaos of dreary thought from whose pressure he could only get any relief by again moving about the room, he went through every incident of his married life which memory or association helped him to recall. It was not that he knew now he had been duped and deceived throughout, but that in nothing had the love and care he had lavished found its reward of reciprocation—that embittered and hardened him. They had lived together as man and wife for nearly twenty years, and this was the end—to find that every day and

month had been a leading up to cardinal sin. She had brought herself to the very verge before he had had a suspicion. He only owed the fact that she had not gone over the verge to the morality of another. And this was Clothilde, the wife whom as girl and woman he had idolised, whose only known sin hitherto he had condoned. He had been blind, blind; too lenient; the failing had been the fall. He might have saved her from herself had he had the courage to treat it with severity, to give rein to his first desperate repugnance. Then again he reasoned that had he done so he might now be feeling the keen reproach of having driven her to this climax. And would anything have averted it?

Then he thought how she must have suffered. Though not knowing nearly so much as Dinah and Anna of the change in many of her habits on the one hand, and of the watchfulness required on the other, he still knew

sufficient to guess now with what devouring restlessness, what absorbing anxiety, what burning speculation, she must have been tortured. And the strain of concealment and deceit must have been frightful; he remembered that in unguarded moments, when they two were alone, she had looked suddenly haggard and old. At other times her apathy had closely bordered on distaste; yes, he had even seen her look at their children with impatient indifference that was almost loathing. He lost himself in these bitter memories of his illusion and self-delusion. He groaned as he thought of their short sweet courtship at Rocozanne in the bright summer in which the whole island had seemed to bathe itself in sunshine for their pleasure. Oh! he had loved and trusted her; nothing but her own sin would ever have robbed her of either so long as life was in him.

Thus the night passed and he had made no plans, done nothing definite. Only, under

all reminiscence and pondering, there lay the simple resolution that they must separate. He was a man of simplicity and rectitude, and it did not occur to him that anything less was possible.

But of intermediate events he had not as yet taken any count. His mind was logically as much exhausted as were the springs of affection within him. And now he awoke suddenly to the necessity for practical arrangements. How were he and Danby to get through the day together? What would happen afterwards? What would Mrs. Danby do? From what Dinah had repeated to him of Hartas's observations of his wife's movements, he was not only certain that the mutual confidence between Mr. and Mrs. Danby was so sincerely intense that he would have already told her all, but also that Mrs. Severn was not to be trusted to self-control in this crisis—worse might happen. He was in duty bound to guard her against that.

Duty, his thoughts centred on the word. Was it indeed the only one he could offer, the only one—born of the mind, not the heart?

'Oh, Clothilde!' he said aloud, 'God knows it is not my fault if I have no other. God help me to feel something different to this when my eyes light on you again.'

The conviction of this shrinking in all its intensity finally determined him that that meeting should not be until after his journey of to-day. He shrank from showing her, by its utter absence now, all that she had thrown away, wasted, despised. His sense of alienation became more overpowering every moment. He felt physically ill. The room was close. He must have fresh air. He wrenched the shutter open, and to his surprise found dawn in the sky—a pale and watery dawn that seemed to wash the face of the earth into a corpse-like lividness. A few streaks of colour were in the east, tinging

the under-side of the reefs of cloud that hung above. There was no suggestion of warmth, rather one of tempest past and to come. He remembered now that there had been a high wind, about midnight, he supposed; he had heard it rush round the house, had felt it shake it to its foundations.

He looked at his watch, forgetting that it must have stopped. When he found that it had, he took up the lamp and went into the kitchen. It was empty, but the embers in the grate were still smouldering, and there was the indescribable feeling of its having been occupied a very short time before. It struck him that some one had sat up nearly all the night—Dinah probably, since she had come again to the parlour long after he imagined every one would be in bed. He raised the lamp and looked at the clock. It was on the point of five. He would have to start for Wonston station in two hours. He realised now how utterly unfit he was for travel and

work, for the strain alone of being with Danby—Danby, whose constant thought must be of the event of yesterday, of the humiliation in store for him, of the expediency of persuading Mrs. Danby to dismiss him at once, and, worst of all, of their mutual plans for the amelioration of his loss and grief. He went back to the parlour and threw himself on the sofa with the determination to sleep. But sleep was far indeed from eyes and brain. After impatient vain efforts to compel it to come and ease him, he got up again, unbarred the front door, and went out. Yes, there was freshness and relief in the morning air. He stood a moment on the flags looking at the faintly brightening sky, then glanced at the house. That glance lingered on the window of his wife's room. Then he turned away and went down the meadows into the wood.

At the very moment in which he turned away, the blind of the window was cautiously moved, and Mrs. Severn looked out. She,

too, had had a sleepless night. A narcotic had lulled its earlier hours, but when the effects of that passed off, she found herself not only wakeful but alarmed. She knew her husband was at home, and when Emmeline came in after tea to ask her again to have something to eat, she mentioned that Hartas Kendrew was with him. She attached no importance to this at the time—was, in fact, not able to fix her mind upon it. But later, when at last she roused herself sufficiently to realise facts, and found that it was past midnight, she was astonished to find her husband was not at her side. She struck a light and looked round the room; she had known him sometimes, under exceptional weariness, sit down upon the settee and unconsciously fall asleep there. But he was not there now.

Yet it was two o'clock. She listened for sounds in the house, but had there been any she could not have heard them, for a gale was blowing. She lay down again, quaking

with fear. To mental misery there now succeeded the terrors she always suffered when alone at night, and especially when the night was stormy. She knew she should not sleep again, she had nothing left with which to induce sleep. She kept the light burning and covered her head with the bedclothes, hoping to shut out some of the ghostly sounds of creaking boards and wainscot that terrified her.

Then there followed the terrors of conscience. As by a lightning flash of introspection she felt herself a guilty woman, as sinning as though her sin were of act as well as thought. The passion of her despairing brooding over Danby gave way to a guilty fear, a foreboding misgiving. He had said he should tell his wife all. What would the consequences be—would he also tell her husband, would Cynthia wish him to do so? Where was her husband? Could he be ill downstairs or—worse, was it possible that

Danby and he had already met, and that he already knew?

No, this was impossible. His manner to his children would have made them feel something was wrong, and Emmeline had spoken of him as being quite merry. Hartas had come. What did that mean, what could he want? She had never known him come to Old Lafer since Kit's conviction. Could Mr. Severn's absence have anything to do with his visit? But what? Supposing Hartas knew—he had found the book she had dropped; was the letter in his possession, could he have brought it to her husband?

But why should he have done so to-night, that very night?

Suddenly a conviction flashed upon her that she and Danby were close to the coal-pit while they talked.

She had not seen the pit. She had stood with her back to it. She had never thought of it. But now she was certain that they had

been there, and on no other part of the moor. Its grotesque mass of timbers and fragments of masonry, that looked so meaningless and haphazard to the uninitiated, rose before her mind's eye with the clearness of a photograph. She felt the balefulness of its many corners—had Hartas been there, listening, looking?

The thought bathed her in cold perspiration one moment, and the next she was in a burning heat. And the thought possessed her. She reasoned against it with clearer concentration of reason than she had ever exercised in her life, but it would not be reasoned away, it would not vanish. On the contrary, its fibres spread deeper and firmer until it confronted her as a fact.

But it was still some time before she treated it as a fact by considering the results, and how to avert or escape from its immediate consequences. She felt herself powerless as she now was, the more powerless as her terror of her husband grew. What would he say?

What would he do? She told herself that she dare not see him, that if he came and she read this knowledge in his eyes, she should fly from him or lose her sense in idiotcy. But he must not come. Oh! why had she not thrown herself into Brockell's Pool? Then she would have lost this frightful numbing heartache; this cramping fear would never have seized her.

In that state she lay for hours. She revolved one plan after another, all pointing to escape; but if her husband were at home and downstairs, she was imprisoned. She dare not attempt anything in the possibility that he might overhear. At last, however, she summoned courage to get up. It was so nearly day that she ventured to dress. She fumbled into her clothes with nervous shaking fingers. In twisting up her hair she saw herself in the glass. She was changed, terribly changed. All the remnants of her youth had fled. She had a wrecked look;

the regular chiselling of her features added now to the pinched haggardness of her face, each seemed to mock the other. She looked and looked again, and felt the revolting certainty that she was looking at death.

It was just as she slipped into her dress that she was startled by a sound in the house. The wind had fallen now, as it generally does at daybreak, and she could hear distinctly. She knew the click peculiar to the handle of the parlour-door. She heard that and then steps going along the passage to the kitchen. She knew they were those of her husband. Then they returned and again there was silence.

But only for a little while. He came forth again almost immediately, and unbarred the front door. The bolts were clumsy, and he did it noisily. The thought passed through her mind that probably his man's blunted perceptions were deluding him into imagining that he was very quiet.

Quick as thought she blew out the candle. He was going out then ; if he saw a glimmer at her window it might decide him to come to her. Anything rather than that! Her senses were strained to the point of torture. If he went away from the house she saw her chance of escape. It would be the only opportunity, for Dinah and Peggy would soon be moving about downstairs. She listened breathlessly, holding her hand to her heart to control its wild beating, as she leant forward close to the blind. She heard the door close. Had he gone out? Yes, that was his step on the flags. A pause. Where was he looking—up, at her window? She must see his face, if possible, that she might judge if she were judged. She cautiously moved the edge of the blind and peered round it. He was in the very act of turning away. But she had seen his face, and knew with what a look he had looked—up, at her window. Now he was in the meadow. She

watched him vanish under its brow. Then he reappeared on the bridge. After that, action was imperative, as quick as thought. She could carry out, or attempt to carry out, the only plan on which her wishes had centred. She took a piece of paper and wrote upon it 'I am going to the Mires for a few days. Please send me some things at once.' This she left upon the dressing-table. The request would, she was certain, so far disarm suspicion that nothing would be sent and thus no inquiries made until late in the day. She wanted to be well in advance of their alarm, and concluded that no one would come to her room until breakfast-time. She knew her husband had an engagement to-day that would take him away before then, but she was wrong in her surmise as to its character, and her impression of his destination. Her only obstacle was her want of money. Five pounds and a few shillings were all she had to command, barely sufficient to pay for her

journey. She was going to Jersey, to Rocozanne, to Anna. She had written the previous day, immediately after coming in, the letter to Mr. Piton which was intended to prepare them for anything, for whatever she might carry through.

But she had thought of a way out of this perplexity too. She knew how often Mr. Severn placed money in the secretaire, sometimes leaving it there for a few days, though always under lock and key. She had seen him busy with his leather cash-bag only a day or two previously; had heard the chink of gold. He might have been engaged at the secretaire during the night, and he might have left it unlocked. It was a forlorn hope, but she would act upon it. She completed her preparations, put on her white fur-lined cloak and her bonnet, cast a hurried searching glance round the room, as though she were looking for her lost virtue, then she noiselessly opened the door and stole downstairs.

The parlour looked unutterably forlorn and comfortless in the sickly daybreak; the shutters were not fastened back, chairs were pushed askew, the cushions of the sofa were dented with use—one had fallen on the floor; in the grate a heap of turf ash suffocated a few sparks of fire; a rug was thrown on the table. But all this, with its impression of deliberate discomfort, of chill and misery of body and mind, was nothing to her. Her eyes, feverishly anxious, were eagerly fixed on the secretaire. It was closed, but the keys were in the lock. She pulled it open. There lay the full bag she coveted!

CHAPTER VIII

PARTED WAYS

But, hurried though she was, she dare not take it lest her husband, returning, should miss it. She counted out ten sovereigns, knowing, from the weight of silver she left, that they would not be missed by a mere cursory handling of the bag. She did not glance round the room again, but passed out instantly into the passage. Another moment and she too stepped forth into the morning air.

And now husband and wife were both, within an hour or two, bound for Wonston station, neither knowing that the other would be there. When he left Old Lafer he never

imagined but that he left her in bed in her own room. She, on the other hand, throughout her long walk, had no other thought than that she left him for ever; his journey of that day took him, she believed, driving in another direction. She did not intend to see him again. She had left him. Beyond her arrival at Rocozanne neither thought nor plan had gone.

She left Old Lafer without one backward glance. It was not of Old Lafer that her mind was full. Husband, children, home, they were nothing to her. But she knew the exact point in the lanes beyond East Lafer where a corner of the roof of the Hall, and its stacks of chimneys, rose above the woods. There she gave herself a few moments' rest. She was leaving Lucius.

The hour was too early for her to meet many people on the roads. To those whom she knew she spoke. When she reached Wonston the tradespeople were just taking

down the shutters of their shops; half the house blinds were still down. At the station she found that the night-porters were not yet off duty. She had not calculated upon this. It was a great relief to her. Their faces were strange to her, she was unknown to them. Not that it mattered much, she already considered herself beyond reach of pursuit. But, conscious of looking wild and haggard, she was thankful to pass unrecognised.

She was twenty minutes before time. But she took her seat in a third-class carriage, and arranged herself in such a manner that she could either take notice of or keep herself unknown to any one who should enter the same compartment. Sitting sideways, facing the far window, she leant back with closed eyes. Her veil was thick, and she rarely wore her fur-lined cloak in Wonston.

In this way a quarter of an hour passed. She wanted rest, she was hungry and worn-

out. She would have time to breakfast at York, and was thankful that no further exertion was necessary before arriving there. For a second or two it seemed that she slept. But if she did she awoke with a feeling of breathless petrifying terror. She was either dreaming, or she heard her husband's voice. She started up and looked wildly round. No one was in sight upon the platform except a porter who was ringing the departure bell with his back to her. She got up and went to the other window and looked out. A little farther down two men were preparing to get into the train, one was just stepping in—it was Danby, and Mr. Severn followed. For a moment she had a wild idea of getting out. But she sank back, too exhausted to move. And then the train moved and it was too late.

What she suffered during that journey was the climax of human misery. Love and fear struggling within her bowed mind and

body as with torturing weights. She felt that to come face to face with either man would be at the final cost of self-control, concealment, deception, and arrangement. She would have no strength or faculty to show herself otherwise than what she was, to devise anything she did not feel. To throw herself upon her husband's mercy meant only the full confession of passion and despair. At him she might dare to look, self-condemned, waiting his judgment; at Danby, never! She knew that there was a hell within her. She need not fear entering hell, it already had entered her. And all this because she knew now that in all her life she had only loved once, had known it ever since she had heard his name again from Mrs. Hennifer. There was no sin in that. The sin lay in the fact of her having deliberately outraged by denial the holiest and most eternal feeling that God had implanted within her. Yes, it was all true what Lucius

had said—he had asked her to be his wife, she had promised. He would never have failed her had she only had the courage and faith to wait. Oh! what a life of peace and bliss would then have been hers. It would have been her right to love him still, to be cherished by him until death should separate them, death alone.

She struggled with these thoughts until she was so spent that no possibility of anything but mechanical action was left to her. And in this spirit she got through her journey. She did not see another face she knew, no familiar figure confronted her on the platform at York, her husband and Danby must have left the train at one of the small intermediate stations. The day passed with the sense of rapid motion which curbed her restlessness better than rest would have done. The landscape flying past cleared the confusion of her mind by its whirl of harmony; better a clear brain and a spent body than

vital energies and clouded sense. At last she found herself walking over the gangway on to the boat that was lashed to Southampton quay. Her steps tottered from fatigue, but she had lost some of the frightful heartache and fear of twelve hours before. Even the familiarity of the scene now round her did not revive this. Here she had said her last good-bye to Danby, had first met John Severn, had arrived on English shores a bride. Her ear was caught by the lap of the water, its gurgle as the boat rocked to and from the quay; she had often listened to its lull in happier days. The same shapeless shapes, with here and there a twinkling light, loomed out of the darkness. Above, the serene sky was set with stars. She stumbled down the stairs and sank on to a couch in the saloon, and slept the sleep of sheer exhaustion.

But she was on deck in the morning when they sighted Grosnez Point. And as they

passed St. Brelade's she saw the little boat in which Borlase was rowing Anna. Her eyes and Anna's met. She disappeared instantly behind another passenger, but it was not so much that she wished to escape recognition as from the shock of seeing Borlase. Until that moment he had never entered her mind. She had forgotten he was here. She detested him. This changed everything. What must she, could she, do now? She would not meet him. He would influence Anna and it would be against her. She would not submit to what she considered his dictatorial authority of scrutiny.

But what alternative was there to that of going to Rocozanne?

CHAPTER IX

IN HAPPY IGNORANCE

That night a gale swept over the islands and broke the mainland cable; and when Mr. Severn, distracted with trouble and with the vain search for his wife, recollected that he had not remembered to telegraph for Anna the previous day, and at last sent a message down to the Wonston office, it was to hear that all such means of communication were cut off, and would be for some hours until the necessary repairs were accomplished. Then it was found that no one had written to her either. Antoinette had begun a letter, but her excitement and misery were too

great to admit of her finishing it. Besides which they were all under the impression that a telegram had been sent, and took it as a matter of course that Anna was now on her way home. So certain were they that nothing less could have been done, that every one thought it unnecessary to ask if it had. Dinah and the girls were all saying 'When Anna gets here,' while she and Borlase were still enjoying themselves in the old way, unconscious of catastrophe at Old Lafer, and with their misgivings over Mrs. Severn lulled. She was longing for another letter from home, while they were half wondering she had not replied before starting, to the cable message Mr. Severn was supposed to have sent. Then came discovery of the mistake and hopeless confused impatience. Meanwhile Mr. Piton was assiduously studying the weather. His pears were harvested, but so many departures and arrivals were in prospect that he could not

but feel a keen personal interest in gales and rocks, boats and cables, times and tides. Borlase's visit was just over, Ambrose and Josephine's honeymoon was waning, and Anna too would leave on the day of their return. The Season population of St. Brelade's was rapidly departing, and every one knew that the equinoctials were coming: the previous night had heralded them.

'You'll have a rough time of it to-morrow, Borlase,' he said, on the last morning when they were going to Gorée. 'Yes, deuce take it, that you will. Better not say anything to Anna, though. Just wire when you're across; we'll hope the cable won't be broken again, they'll get it patched up to-day.'

'I've been thinking about it,' said Borlase. 'I don't mind a tossing from the hurricane deck, but I hope it will be quiet when her turn comes.'

'All the more chance of that if it's rough now. The equinoctials are early this year

and must have their fling, you know. That's what wet vraic on my door and gulls in the bay mean at this time of year. They've just caught you, and they'll catch poor little Josephine, and she can't abide a tossing. It'll make her ill, she'll come home limp. A good thing for me. I'll order her off to bed and let her see I'm good for some ordering yet.'

The sky was stormily beautiful as Borlase and Anna drove out of the village, full of thunderous piles of cloud moving slowly south as though they were being swept into space. From time to time they thinned to drop sultry beams of sunshine that spread slowly from sea to shore only to be re-eclipsed, then again to appear in a glimmer along the horizon or a sheet of golden light on the high land. A line of surf outlined the shore, playing with dolphin-like sinuosities at the base of the cliffs. After passing through St. Helier's the road struck inland

betwixt overhanging trees. Above Grouville they again sighted the sea. It glistened beyond La Hocque and La Rocque in a rain of sun-rays, with here and there a martello-tower catching the light. Then they dropped into Gorée down a ravine, whose vista was closed by Mont Orgueil Castle standing battlemented and ivy-hung on its granite promontory.

After lunch they went out on to the quay. It was a sort of rampart thrown up between the sea and a dyke that was hollowed from the solid rock. On the top of the rock were card-like houses coloured thin yellows, greens, and blues, with frail windows and more sun-shutter than glazing. Ladders with hand-rails led up to their tiny gardens that were trellised with vines and overhung with marguerites and chrysanthemums. Here and there was a bit of robust British tiling. Above, the wooded hills stood out against the sky. Women were hanging out clothes,

dogs and babies crawled up and down the ladders, a group of fishermen were chewing tobacco with their hands stuffed low down in their trousers' pockets. A small schooner came idly round the pier and anchored below the castle, its tan sails flapping in the breeze.

'I know I shall often think of all this when I'm back in Wonston,' said Borlase.

'And when I'm back too we shall often talk of it. I declare it makes me quite home-sick to think you are going. But I shall not wait to see Ambrose and Josephine. I shall go by that day's boat.'

'And remember I am to meet you and drive you up to Old Lafer.'

'Yes, if all the cases are amenable to reason and don't send for you. But if they do what is to become of me, please?'

'Your resources will never fail, my dear Anna.'

'Nor Wonston cabs either, I suppose. Now, Geoff, isn't this beautiful?'

They had reached the top of the Castle's battlemented tower. Below, straight as a plumb-line, the ivied walls gave way to the rocks that slid, after some fifty more feet, into a reef of golden vraic, where a man in a blue blouse was busy with lobster cages. Borlase put his arm round her as she leant over the parapet to listen to the far-off lap of the waves. The sun was shining; against the ruffled blue of the sea, gulls circled like flakes of silver; now and then shadows from the clouds shuddered across in a stain of purple flecked with foam. On a clear day they might have seen the towers of Coûtances on the low French shore. She told him tales of prisoners. From one window a Dean of Jersey and his son had tried to escape, the one was dashed to pieces on the rock, the other brought back to die; bodies of pirates used to rot in the chains rattling against the keep; here was the cell where Prynne was banished after the slitting of his ears; crosses

marked the path in the stone stairs up which the villagers used for centuries to climb to service in the chapel. Peace and violence had been closely linked. In one corner the Gospel of Christ had been taught; crime and misery and violent deaths had impregnated every other.

It was dusk when they started home. A mist was over the sea, and the surf sounded more loudly each moment. The lights along the shore and in the farmhouses among the orchards glimmered fitfully in the gusts of wind. The sky was laden with inky cloud overhanging the last lurid gleam of the sunset. As it grew darker the outlines of the land became colossal. All else was lost. It loomed before them against the sky until they dropped down to the shore again. A line of surf now marked its indentations. Beyond was the rush of waves and a roar of waters. As they reached the cliffs above St. Brelade's the clouds suddenly parted and the

moon struggled through. It silvered a surf running madly up the beach and spray dashing against Noirmont. The bay was a sheet of foam like molten lead, a witch's caldron with a brew of mischief and malice stirring to its depths. Anna's face blanched and she shuddered.

'Geoff, you shan't go to-morrow,' she said.

He had been expecting this for the last hour and was ready with a smile. He drew her cloak more closely round her as he answered.

'I must,' he said, 'and I shall enjoy a gale. Remember I'm not an arrant coward as you are. It will be daylight, and no fog in a wind, and I love a hurricane-deck under stress of weather. If the boat goes, I go. I've driven my time to its extremity. And you must not be anxious, dear.'

'Oh no, of course not,' said Anna derisively.

She said no more and held her head averted. She had muffled her head in a shawl, and try as he would he could not see within it. He flipped the whip and shook the reins, and they bowled along from the bottom of the hill at a spanking pace and betwixt the closely-shuttered houses whose summer visitants had flown. He peered round that exasperating shawl, but vainly. She would look at the bay. She would not let him see that there were tears in her eyes. There they were, and then they overflowed and rolled down her cheeks, and she dare not lift a hand to dash them away. But when they reached Rocozanne he threw the reins over the horse's back and, jumping down, ran round to her side of the dog-cart and held out his arms.

'Come, Anna,' he said, 'I'm going to lift you down. You can't see the step. You'll slip.'

For an instant she hesitated. She had

turned her head swiftly. Should she spring from the other side, dart indoors and elude him? What did he mean by saying she could not see? She could, she——

'Now, Anna,' he said again, a little impatience but more imperious coaxing in his voice, and she caught his eager glance.

'Well, Geoff,' she said, yielding. And he had his way, and the light from the lantern swinging in the groom's hand showed him her wet cheeks. 'For me, her first tears for me,' he thought. They went into the hall, and then he turned sharply and put his hands on her shoulders and looked at her.

'Why, Anna,' he said, a world of tenderness in tone and eyes.

'Yes; what a fool I am; but I couldn't bear to lose you, Geoff, Geoff,' she said disjointedly betwixt laughing and crying. The hall was dim, only a lamp on the table that threw them in grotesque shadows on the wall and half across the ceiling. Her glance

wavered and fell. Then, in a moment, she had shaken herself free and was running upstairs.

Borlase looked after her as he took off his coat and gloves. He was astounded by her elusiveness. It was not that of a coquette, but of a woman so true and tender that the more she felt the less she could bear to show, the quieter she became. His deep-hearted Anna, who could weep in silence, but would front him with a smile! He had seen her weep for others, but never until to-night had it struck him that the well-spring both of tears and smiles was all his now. He held the key of the casket. There was a jewel within. He knew how brightly it would shine in their home.

Tea was spread in the little salon. Mr. Piton had had a fire lit, and was standing on the rug with his coat-skirts tucked under each arm. He meant everything to be very cheerful within. He was almost praying

that the wind would keep down for a few hours. Time enough for it to rave to-morrow evening at that time, then Borlase would be safely across, and Anna need not be miserable. He looked keenly at her when she came in. So did Borlase, as he stood with his elbow on the mantelpiece and his face shaded by his hand. They saw a vision of brightness. The sharp salty air had given her unusual colour, and added to the sparkle of her eyes. If something else had added to it too, only she and Borlase knew, and he would not presume on his knowledge. She was determined not to spoil this last evening, either for them or herself, by being *triste* or foreboding. It would be short enough! They might never spend another together at Rocozanne. And after all, what was an equinoctial gale? Did they not blow every year; would not the tossing really be invigorating to him? Yes, fog was the true danger. And there would

be no fog. So she reasoned while she hurried to change her dress, throwing off her things anywhere, without any other thought than that of haste, putting on a white serge which he admired, and fastening a bunch of red chrysanthemums under her chin. The little salon seemed to match her. It was fresh and bright in the glow from the fire, the walls were of the same Wedgewood yellow as the hall, the furniture covered and flounced with pale blue chintz with roses scattered over it, the glass and silver sparkling on the table. She cast a housewifely glance over all. Yes, it was as it should be, ham, eggs, honey, cakes, rolls, and butter, a vase of late roses, a dish of pears. The pears were a little one-sided in their arrangement. She went and rearranged them, and, by holding her head very slightly on one side to avoid the dazzle of the lamp, managed to give Borlase a smile. He felt it was a special smile.

Three hours later she was standing in the garden listening to his retreating steps up the road. She had flung a shawl over her head and gone out with him. There was a lull in the wind, but the moon had gone in, and it was too dark to see him far beyond the gate. She stood some time after she could neither see nor hear. He had looked back once more at the very last moment in which they could distinguish each other, and she waited on until she thought he must be out of the village. They had left his luggage at Bree's in town as they drove out to Gorée; it was more handy for the boat, and he would sleep there. And now, 'What of the night?' 'What of the night?' It was certainly a little quieter, and the tide was falling back—no lashing of spray now against the sea-wall, and she could not see Noirmont. But what would it be when she was watching the boat cross the open in the morning? She would not think about it. The dangers of sunken

rocks, of the Casquettes, of such scenes as she had read in Victor Hugo's *Travailleurs de la Mer*, which had turned her blood cold. She rushed in, bolted the door noisily as though to defy herself, and went straight into the little salon.

Mr. Piton was poking the fire. Evidently the fire was his great resource to-night. He went on poking it, raising the freshly-put-on coals, then raking out the lower bars, until his face was red and his head glistening. This gave him a further excuse for concealing himself by mopping his face. But he felt it was an ostrich-like concealment. Really Anna had taken him by surprise. He quite thought she would have gone upstairs, but some of the most womanly women were deucedly unwomanly after all.

'Well, Anna,' he said at last, 'so I suppose you got your letters in town to-day, eh? as the postman never called here that I know of; deuced sly of you too. And none from

Ambrose or Jo for me. Well, well; I've had a busy day with my pears; got them all sorted, and not before they ought to be either. As for apples, perhaps they're a poor affair on the whole, though I'm not so warty as my neighbours. I can forgive the potato craze. But why don't we make more of the soil, eh?'

'Yes, why don't we?' said Anna, in unwary abstraction.

'*We?* you, indeed! And what have you to do with it, or what do you care? But I'm certain we might have both. Borlase was telling me what they do in Cornwall. At Gulnac, near Penzance, where he hails from, there are fields that grow cauliflowers in rows under rasps trained in arches, and apples above the two. That's economy for you. A deuced utilitarian mind at work there, I say.'

'I don't like those utilitarian minds, uncle. There are some at Wonston that have robbed us of the grassy margins to the roads that

were so lovely for a gallop. And what one hears about reservoirs in our dales and cisterns and hydrants from our becks makes one feel ill. I know what you'll say—exigencies of existence, over-population, adapting one's self to circumstances, et cetera. When I hear all that, I wish I were not living in the nineteenth century, for, of course, really and truly, I am superfluous.'

'Of course, of course. What a pity but that there could be a big weeding-out before things get worse—production give way to consumption, literally, in fact! Deuce take it, Anna, we want a pestilence among us, and we don't want hospitals and homes full of incurable diseases, for which every human faculty should be strained to keep life. Let the optimists go there for an answer to the question, *Is life worth living?* As for the clerics, they're worth nothing unless they've instilled into the poor wretches emulation for the affirmative in their *Lord, is it I?* when

death stalks in among them. Heavens! if I'd disease upon me wouldn't I pray to be "as a dead man, out of mind," without any palavering! I like that doctor of yours, Anna. He's a man of sound sense. He falls in with my views exactly; he's for cremation; under the rose, out of deference to the susceptibilities of Wonston. But he's only ripe before the time, like a pear that's not had a leaf betwixt it and the sun. And now let's have some music. Ah! I wish Josephine could sing; it would be better than dummy whist.'

She sang to him, and he dozed with a handkerchief thrown over his head. But they did not sit up late. If there were a gale to-night it would rise at midnight. He wanted her to be asleep before then, and she was certainly tired. But she knew when the gale would rise quite as well as he, and that she would not sleep.

She went to bed first. As she went up-

stairs a sudden blast of wind tore round the house, dying away immediately as suddenly as it had risen. When in her room she knelt down to say her prayers. Perhaps she knelt longer than usual, but before she rose again there was another and longer rush, a shrieking in the chimney and rattling of the windows. The gale was on them. It increased while she undressed. She had to strain her ears to hear the barring of the doors downstairs, the creak of Mr. Piton's steps on the stairs, sounds to which she was accustomed as of nightly recurrence. To-night she did not hear him stop at her door and stand listening. When she made no sound, he rapped and spoke.

'Anna!'

'I am awake, uncle,' she said.

'Are you afraid?'

'No.'

'Don't think it an earthquake if the house

shakes. It'll be tremendous at midnight, no doubt of that now.'

'I hope I shall be asleep.'

'I hope so too. It'll get over to-night, 'll be quieter in the morning. Good-night, my Anna.'

'Good-night, and thank you.'

Then he passed on, his door closed, and in the house there was silence.

CHAPTER X

'BY FATE COMPELLED'

But the storm outside momentarily increased. Rain, wind, and sea were soon raging in concert. Windows rattled, the house shook. There was a grinding of the sea upon the rocks, then it tore itself off again. Rain, dashing against the leaded panes on the fiercest blasts, was succeeded by bursts of moonshine that came and went fitfully as the clouds rushed over the moon, then parted again. Anna got no sleep. She lay listening and thinking, wondering if the boat would start. If not, Geoff would come over again. But it would be too vexatious if they

started and then put into Petersport to wait there. By midnight anxiety had actually frightened her into nervousness; she who was never nervous, had no nerves in fact! She could no longer endure the war of wind and sea, the shifting streaks of moonlight that moved round the room throwing strange lights and stranger shadows, and were more exciting in their stealthy silence than the roar without. She got up, struck a light, and slipping on her dressing-gown began to tidy the room of the things she had thrown off in a hurry a few hours before. The shawl she had knotted over her head in the gale was on one corner of the dressing-table, she had flung it there without a glance. She took it up—something fell to the ground. It was a letter that had evidently been placed there for her to get so soon as she came in. Then the postman had been, and this was from Wonston. But the writing was illiterate, it was Scilla Kendrew's, she

saw the signature the moment she opened it. And this was what she read—

'Honoured dear Miss Anna — I must write a few lines to tell you what has happened, hoping this will find you well, as it leaves me at present, and baby and Kit. I got the letter you sent me about what I was to have from you if I wanted it, but I did not, all went so well with me. But I thank you all the same. 'Tis your thought of me I love. And now I must tell you what I have taken my pen to say. 'Tis father, old Hartas, he's dead, dear Miss Anna. I can't believe it yet, although he lies upstairs now, waiting for the burying. He is such a terrible corpse, Kit won't let me see him. I don't want to either. And I that watched him away only yesterday'—she looked at the date, it bore that of three or four days previously—'and thought as he went over the edge of the hollow how happy Kit and baby and me would be without him. It

almost seems now that I wished him an ill wish. He didn't come home that night though he'd said partickler he would, but we didn't think much of that—he sometimes didn't get along when he'd drunk hard at Brockell's or East Lafer. He'd said he was going to Old Lafer, but we never thought he'd got as far or we'd maybe have thought of the pits. Well, morning came and the men went off grumbling because he wasn't there, Kit and Dick and Reuben Chapman. And first they came upon his hat, which made them think something was wrong, and then they found a bottle—it had been full of gin, but it had poured out in the ling, and they've none found the top yet, so it's certain he'd knocked it off somewhere lower down the moor or in the woods and drunk himself crazy and past knowing what he was after. They began to search all round then, and a terrible fear came into Kit, he says, about the shaft. Well they found nought more,

and they began to think of going down, and then, Kit says, they all looked each at the other, and they all knew what they were thinking on, really. None of them wanted to go down, but if they'd come away then they'd only have had to do it another day. Well, Kit and Reuben went and Dick minded the coil. But they didn't get fair to the bottom, for the cage dropped on something that were huddled in a heap, and oh! dear Miss Anna, it was father. He was stone-dead, and such a sight. My hand trembles so I can scarce write. But I'm certain they'll have heard something at Old Lafer and 'll write it, so I thought I must send you the whole truth. They brought him home, and we'll have to have an inquest. Kit's down in Wonston now about it. Mrs. Chapman's in here. She says there was one on a child in Wonston last week, so there'll have to be another to make three. Oh, Miss Anna, 'tis such a wicked life that's gone, and would he know

what was happening, do you think, in time to say one prayer? Kit says as the tree falls, so it lies. I think 'tis so terrible when a life goes out and folk can only say the world's well quit of it. I only hope he did no more mischief before his time came. You'll be home soon now, dear Miss Anna, and you'll come and see me I know.—Your respectful servant, SCILLA KENDREW.'

The substance of this letter electrified Anna. The postmarks of the envelope proved that it had come direct after having been posted; therefore, unless Scilla had made a mistake in her date, it was simply astounding that she had heard nothing from Old Lafer in the interval — that no one should have written from there to tell her of such a horrible accident. Instinctively all her misgivings revived, the conviction that she had seen Clothilde on the steamer returned in full force. She felt that something more than Hartas Kendrew's death had

happened. But if Clothilde had come out to the Islands, where was she now? and why had she come? The silence of a few days seemed to her as impenetrable and inexplicable as though it had lasted for years. She could only resolve however to telegraph home to-morrow, to ask if all were right there. Borlase, too, would telegraph when he reached Wonston.

As she thought of this she went to the window, and putting aside the blind looked out.

At that moment it was dark with another shower sweeping over the sky. But again the moon burst out, shining on the bay whose wild lashings crested every wave with a steel-like glimmer, bathing one spray-dashed headland in misty light, burying another in densest gloom. It was so beautiful, so wan and weird in its tumult, that she drew up the blind, wrapped herself up warmly and sat down to watch it.

But scarcely had she done so than a thrill of amazement and alarm seized her. Her glance had fallen casually upon the garden. Among the pampas grass at the top of the steps down to the beach she saw something move. It was a dark object like a head, as though a figure were standing half-way up the steps and looking between the plants. She gazed fascinated.

Another moment and she turned faint with surprise. The head raised itself, still cautiously and gradually a man appeared. She recognised him before he came forward. It was Borlase. He was looking at her, and had evidently feared he should alarm her. He came below her window. She threw it up and leant out.

'What is it, Geoff?' she said. She knew something unforeseen must have sent him back from St. Helier's at such an hour.

'Rouse Mr. Piton to come down and let me in,' he said.

He stood waiting in the porch until Mr. Piton came down and unbarred the door. Anna followed, and it was to her he spoke.

'Something is wrong at Old Lafer, Anna,' he said. 'There was a telegram waiting for me at Bree's. I have to take you back with me to-morrow.'

'That is to-day?' she said. A searching look of inquiry had passed between them.

He nodded, hoping she would ask no more. She did not, but went upstairs. She had so much to prepare for her journey.

Mr. Piton turned into the little salon and Borlase followed him.

'What is it? Something serious has happened. You have walked back the moment you had reached town?' he said.

'Yes,' said Borlase, 'the message tells us no more than what I have told Anna. I suppose they've depended upon me to get

her through the journey without dying of fear and suspense. I fancy it's these confounded gales; there's been a mess with the cable you know. But I've had a letter from Marshall, the man who's doing my practice you know, and he mentions incidentally, in a postscript in fact, that Wonston is convulsed with an event, a bona fide event. The fact is, Mr. Piton,' he went on, dropping his tone of satirical irritation, 'that Mrs. Severn has disappeared, left her home, and no trace of her can be found. And there is an ugly rumour—indeed I fear the worst has happened to that poor soul that could have happened.'

'And is it said why she has so sinned against herself and her Maker, Geoffry?'

'No,' said Borlase hastily, 'not a word.'

The keen-edged suspicion of Mr. Piton's tone and glance was his too.

Still another question was on Mr. Piton's lips.

'And you think those two are a happy pair, Danby and his wife?'

'I do. I am convinced of it.'

'He adores her, I suppose; sweet gay creature that she is. Poor Clothilde!'

'Yes,' said Borlase, 'it seems to me that her one and only enemy has been her lower self. What, I wonder, has been or will be the tragic end!'

CHAPTER XI

THE WHOLE TRUTH

And at Lafer Hall there was the deep shadow of this trouble, but only the shadow.

On the day when Borlase and Anna were expected home Cynthia was sitting in the drawing-room in the afternoon, waiting for her husband to come in before ringing for tea, when the door opened and Tremenheere was announced. As she got up to meet him, standing with a mass of soft white silk embroidery on her arm, and the gleam of firelight on her hair and in her lovely eyes, he thought he had never seen her look so beautiful. She was in a loose golden-hued

tea-gown that fell round her in dainty drapery of silk and lace. And the room was still all white and amber with rich-toned art-treasures on the walls and cabinets, and groups of flowering plants, sweet, fresh, and bright, throwing airy shadows here and there on the white velvet carpet.

Outside, the twilight was deepening over the park beyond the terrace and the level gloom of the cedars. But within all was bright with a pervading sense of happiness. Tremenheere, looking more closely than usual into her eyes, felt their calm goodness to his heart's core. Little was wanted to complete the ideal womanhood that she had always seemed to him to possess.

'This is very kind,' she said, 'to come just now when I was actually feeling dull. I wonder Lucius is not in, he expected to be before this. But you need not hurry, of course. We really all feel disorganised; this suspense is so frightful, Anthony.'

'I have just come from Old Lafer,' he said, 'but Severn was out. Constantine said he always is, he can't keep still, he's wearing himself to death in this search.'

'I've been there myself to-day,' said Cynthia. 'It was fine, so I walked through the woods. All those poor children look so pale. What a blessing when Anna gets home! I am sending the carriage down for her. But come, tell me about Theo: is she gone? And you'll have some tea.'

She rang the bell and stirred the fire into a blaze. Its light leapt along the ormolu and crystal, and glanced in her shining eyes as she leant back, smiling and looking at him.

'Oh yes, Theo and St. John have gone to-day. She sent you her love, her best love, and she would never cease to regret your absence from the ball last night. It was a "lovely" ball, "really a brilliant affair."'

'Theo's always are,' said Cynthia, laugh-

ing. 'The last to which she goes always eclipses all others. She never loses her faculty for enjoyment of that sort of thing. It's delightful of her. And I should have liked to be at Lady Lavinia's last night, I confess, but we talked it over and we could neither of us bear the idea of going under the circumstances. Something may be known at any moment,—besides which there were Mr. Severn's feelings to consider. And people are so strange,—we should have been plied with questions. But I knew Theo would be vexed.'

'She would have stayed another day and come up to talk it all over, but St. John was in a fidget and would be off. They have gone to stay with Julia. You'll know old Kendrew was buried to-day?'

'Yes,' said Cynthia.

She was busy with the tea-equipage, the diamonds on her fingers flashing and sparkling as she arranged the cups. Tremenheere,

watching her steadily, saw that her hands did not tremble, although she had flushed a deep red, and bent slightly forward as though to hide it. They sat in silence a little while. He was now looking into the fire. And she, as she drank her tea, looked at him, striving to be sure whether he were more serious than usual or whether she imagined it.

At last their eyes met again. She smiled but he did not.

Cynthia put down her cup.

'Anthony,' she said, 'you have something on your mind. You want to name it, to ask me something. Tell me what it is.'

Tremenheere got up, and, walking to the window, stood there a few moments. It was to hide the agitation of his face, not to decide an undecided matter, that he had moved. But she thought it was for the sake of gaining time to form a resolution.

'Anthony, you may ask me anything?' she said.

He came back, and, standing on the rug opposite to her, with his arm on the mantelpiece and his hand shading, while it moved nervously over his brow, he looked down at her.

Her face was upturned towards him.

'Anything,' she said; 'you are my oldest friend—and Theo.'

'There is a question I want to ask you, Cynthia, because there is something I think I must tell you,' he said slowly. 'But you may never forgive me.'

'Yes, I will. You have heard some gossip, a slander? You only care because you fear it may affect my happiness?'

He nodded.

'It is so,' he said.

'Well?' she said with a very slight straightening of her lips.

'This seems to me a very strange and unhappy affair altogether,' he exclaimed suddenly, relieving himself of the tension on

his mind and throwing himself into a chair. 'Since you give me such generous license, I may explain myself fully. I heard an extraordinary rumour to-day. It was to the effect that your husband had once been engaged to marry Mrs. Severn. Of course I did not give it a moment's credence, but it is most unfortunate that any slanderous rumours should arise now and form the nucleus of a scandal. Cynthia, you know that for you to be associated with such would be a heavy grief to me.'

'You need suffer no heavy grief on that score, Anthony. What you heard is perfectly true, but there is neither pain nor shame in it to me.'

She spoke clearly and firmly. He looked at her confounded.

'Remember,' she said in the same tone, 'the truth is never to be called a slanderous rumour. And in this case neither is it a scandal.'

'Brave words, Cynthia,' he said.

'I don't need courage,' she answered.

'No, you never did, for the truth.'

'Oh! I didn't mean that, not myself,' she exclaimed impatiently. 'I was thinking of Lucius; there is nothing to defend; certainly, least of all, in him.'

'Did you know this when you married?'

'Yes. All.'

'And when you were engaged, did the Admiral?'

'Grandpapa? No. Don't, Anthony,' she cried, clasping her hands, then flinging them apart in the dear old habit he knew so well. 'I can't bear to think of him in it. He should have known before our wedding-day.'

She was excited now. Tremenheere got up again involuntarily, feeling that he could better bear her half-disdainful calmness than the old girlish impetuous vehemence, such as had been hers in the days when he wooed her.

'Cynthia,' he said, 'tell me, can you bear to tell me, if you have ever had any fear, any suspicion of her?'

She looked at him vaguely, then with a sudden tenseness of comprehension that dilated her lovely eyes, and, in dilating them, gave an inexpressible pathos such as he felt instantly could only be sacred to some crowning experience of her life.

'That's a searching question,' she said; 'more so than I expected. But you are a very dear friend, and nothing that I say to you can profane my husband'—she stopped a moment with a look of exaltation on her face—'my *dear* husband,' she said softly. 'Now, I will tell you the truth, Anthony. Five days ago, for one whole day, I did not only suspect her, but I suspected him.'

'Good God!' said Tremenheere.

'Yes, I did.'

'But it is over?'

'Yes, yes,' she said, throwing back her

head. 'And I was justified. He said so. Still, I shall never cease to wish to my dying day that I never had mistrusted him. But I told him my faith might fail, oh! long ago, before we married. He frightened me by idealising me, and I knew my weakness. Love made me weak just where it ought to have made me wonderfully strong. But I always tried to make him believe I was not wonderful, not really. But he would not. Lovers won't.'

'No,' said Tremenheere.

She blushed, thinking too deeply to remember that she might have inflicted pain.

'He is so good to me,' she said happily.

'I do not doubt it for a moment.'

'I will tell you all,' she said. 'It was Hartas Kendrew. Somehow he knew something. He met Lucius and me on the moor once and insulted me, and Lucius knocked him down. He had found a letter which she had been so foolish as to begin to Lucius.

Then she met Lucius on the moor last week, and they were close to the pits, and he was there and overheard all she said. And to revenge himself then upon me for Kit's conviction, and the poor old horse he had to shoot after the Northside Edge sale, you remember, he sent me her letter and worse of his own. Lucius was away that day, had started before the letters came, and I was alone all day with nothing else to think of, and——'

She stopped, tears stifled her voice. She pushed the tea-table aside, feeling suffocated, and, getting up, walked to and fro in the room, bent upon regaining self-control. He sat down, and taking up a magazine, turned over the pages, feigning to examine its illustrations.

'There was just one little thing he had not told me,' she said quietly at last, coming and standing before the fire. 'It was that. I knew all the time he would have told me

of having met her on the moor before he went away, had there been time. But Theo was with me that day, and you and St. John dined and slept here. And Theo and I had a long chat in my dressing-room at night, and then when you left the smoking-room and he came upstairs I was asleep. It was strange, was it not, that the little thing made me doubt the larger, not the larger the less? But I kept saying to myself, "Why did he not tell me he had seen her before"?'

'And did you do nothing?'

'Yes. But I don't know how I got through breakfast and the hour or two before you all left. Did you think there was anything unusual about me, strained or unnatural? Do you remember? You were opposite to me at table; for you were good enough to take Lucius's place. I did not fear Theo or St. John, but I did fear you.'

'I noticed nothing unusual. Either I was

unobservant or you were a very natural actress.'

'Well, the time passed. You were leaving so soon that I made a desperate effort to hide everything. Once I thought of asking Theo to spend the day with me. But I knew she was going to lunch at the Ponsonbys, and I was certain that I should tell her nothing. She would not have understood—oh! many things. So I let you all go. And then I longed for some one to whom to talk. If only Mrs. Hennifer had been here! She knew Mrs. Severn years ago, and she had known Lucius too then. We often spoke of it after Lucius told me, and we should have done again, and she would have comforted and advised me.'

'And did you do nothing—you did, you say. What was it?'

'Yes. I started for Old Lafer to see her. And half-way through the wood I met old

Elias Constantine, and he said his mistress was lost; they could not find her or hear anything of her. He went on. I felt almost dead. The most horrible thought seized me, Anthony.'

She turned pale at the recollection even now. He was moved almost beyond himself. He waved his hand involuntarily, as though to dismiss the thought from the minds of both her and himself.

'I know it,' he said.

'Yes. He had gone too, you know. Oh! it would have killed me——'

'Dear Cynthia, it was impossible,—*your* husband,' said Tremenheere in a heart-felt voice.

'But I never thought sufficient of myself. He often has told me so. I had no confidence that I was worthy love. I never had. It is such a marvellous gift. Why should he care so much for *me?*'

Tremenheere was silent. Unanswerable

question by one to whom the giving of such love had been denied!

'And so I suffered,' said Cynthia.

She had sat down again, and was leaning sideways against the back of her chair with one arm thrown over it and her hands clasped. This simple confession, combined with the instinctive agonised reasoning of a woman in what had been the crucial moment of her life, struck him with an overwhelming tenderness.

'Oh! to think that *you* should have to suffer!' he said, covering his eyes.

'And then Lucius came home.'

He perceived again that she was not thinking of herself, had not heard or heeded his thought of her.

'Yes,' he said.

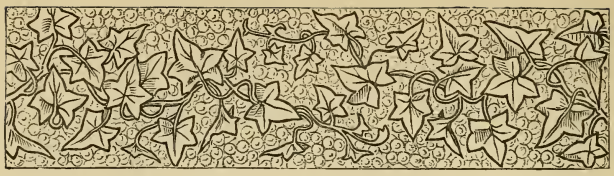
'The moment I saw him I trusted him, and I knew the truth—that *she* had gone because he had told her the truth. But I told him all—what I had thought and felt.'

She sighed deeply. Then suddenly she smiled. But though she looked at him, Tremenheere knew it was a smile that heralded that with which she would greet her husband's return; it was winged by thought of him.

Almost immediately afterwards he got up to go. This that he had heard had set his fears at rest, even as their life together would set at rest any ill-natured rumour that might float for a while only to die a natural death. No comment was required, it admitted of no argument. It was the epitome of her life's history, the one experience of her life in the sense of experience being a hard teacher. It was sacred and it sanctified her. He knew now that she had strength for much more than it was probable she would be called upon to endure. The signing of such a covenant between herself and her husband was the final seal against the tragedy of lives that lies in misunderstanding.

When he had gone she went to the windows and looked out. It was nearly dark; a tempestuous wind drove the clouds rapidly over the sky. She wished again, wondering afresh at his long absence, that her husband were home.

But he was sure to come any moment now. She moved restlessly about the room for a while, smelling the flowers, playing a few bars of music, lingering over the treasures of art and curiosity, and remembering where they had bought one and another. Then she rang for lights and inquired of the servant if the carriage had gone to the station. It had, a few minutes before. When alone again she returned to her chair by the fire and took up her work. The white silken folds, when spread upon her knee, were like a christening robe.



CHAPTER XII

'THINGS AT THE WORST WILL CEASE'

MEANWHILE Danby on his way home from Wonston had fallen in with Mr. Severn, who was riding too, and together they drew near to the old bridge.

One subject was uppermost in both their minds, but it was dismissed with a brief imparting of as much information as there was to impart. Nothing had been heard; no clue found as yet; but it was impossible that this state of things should last long. Detectives were at work both in England and in Jersey; for Anna had telegraphed before leaving St. Helier's that she was convinced

she had seen Mrs. Severn a few days before on one of the mail steamers just reaching port. Mr. Severn's reasons for riding home this way he kept to himself, not caring to explain that a rumour had reached him that in Scilla Kendrew's mind the old bridge and his wife were indelibly associated. He was almost ashamed to believe what he had heard. He told himself it could only have originated in an uncultured mind predisposed to superstition; but, in spite of his reason, the credulity of despair led him with fascination towards the supernatural, and, with or without excuse, he had crossed the old bridge so constantly during the last two days as to feel that he was haunting it. Last night's twilight had brought forth nothing. But that of to-night might be more kind. He rode heavily, with a spiritless dull air on his care-worn face and a nerveless hand on the rein.

And against the bridge there now stood a waiting figure and it was Mrs. Severn.

She had returned from Jersey by Weymouth on the day following her arrival there, never having wavered in her hasty perverse determination not to see Borlase. She stayed at Weymouth until nearly the whole of her money was spent. That was soon, for she did not try to harvest it. She spent it in indulgence of the old craving, leaving at last with dreadful signs of dissipation about her in her trembling hands, unsteady eyes, and untidy dishevelment of dress—a figure that raised derisive smiles among the servants of the hotel, and dismayed pity in the minds of those of her own class in life who observed her at the stations on her route north again, or travelled with her, and realised that here was a sad wreck of womanhood.

When she reached Wonston she slipped out of the station as quickly as possible. She had not much reasoning faculty left, but what she had was now fixed on the knowledge that a search must be being made for

her, and a determination to elude discovery. One idea possessed her. Her clouded mind was clear here. She had no intention of trying to conquer her worst self, of rising above the sickening weight of misery in her heart; that meant living on for years, somewhere. In her own singularly dispassionate way she was now reckless. Throughout these last few days one place alone had haunted her thoughts, the quiet tree-hung pool below Lafer old bridge.

But she wanted to see Danby again once. Months, years, seemed to have passed since she met him on the moor.

She turned off into the lower parts of the town where she was not known, where no one would recognise her unless by chance she was seen by a clergyman or a doctor on his pastoral or professional round. But in spite of the twilight, the fitful flicker of the lamps and her downcast eyes, she did see Danby. She happened to glance up while

crossing a narrow street close to its bisecting of a main street, and he was walking on the pavement of the latter, down towards the market square. She saw also that he carried his riding-whip, and was gaitered for horse-back. He would be riding home. She might see him on the road.

It was a vivifying thought. She hurried on, and soon left the town behind, emerging in a field-path that made a short cut to the bramble-bossed stray over which the poor people had rights of pasturage for their cattle in summer time. The wind was dead against her, and she stopped once or twice to get breath. The moors in front alternately vanished in lowering masses of cloud, and reappeared as the wind rushing over them, tore the clouds into drifts. The valley of the Woss was misty. Behind the town was a lake-like space of sky suffused with a lurid sunset glow. Against it the Minster towers stood out above the smoke-haze that hung

over the houses. The trees in the hedge-rows traced a filigree of leafless branches upon the horizon, and tossed and strained in the blast.

She wondered if it would rain to-night, or if the clouds would disperse, giving way to frost. This smiting wind stung her face, and tore at her cloak and bonnet. She drew her cloak tightly round her and struggled on again. Her strength seemed to be failing. She passed some children loitering home from school. They looked curiously at her, but whether they half suspected who she was, or were frightened by the rigid whiteness of her face, she did not know. She had unwarily put her veil up, but now she dragged it down again. When at last she reached the stray, she involuntarily slipped down on to a stone that protruded from the base of one of the gate posts, and there she rested.

But for the maddening hope of seeing Danby, she felt she might have sat there

half the night. She was worn out. She had had no natural sleep since leaving home. She sat straining her eyes into the gathering darkness. She heard the roll of wheels along the road below, it was Mrs. Danby's carriage going to the station for Anna. But she had imagined that Anna would be home long before this. She could not see either the Hall or Old Lafer, but the moors backed them, she could fancy where each was. Her clouded fancy hovered over both. But no thought of her home, of her children, engendered hesitation. She was chilled through and through; the parlour at Old Lafer would be warm, lighted, cosy. But she did not wish to be there. She felt only a sick dread and fear of her husband. She had no wish for a kiss from one of them. She knew they would only shudder away from her. She was powerless to think of any other end to her misery than that that was before her.

She got up again and walked on. The way was easy now, down hill to the river and the bridge. She kept to the grass, however, as the safer from encountering any one, and there were rough hummocks over which she stumbled again and again, recovering herself hardly by wild clutches at the air that restored her balance.

And now she heard the river, and it struck her that it was in flood; there must have been heavy rains up west. This gave her a greater sense of security.

A few moments more and she was on the bridge. She leant over the parapet. The water rushed below in a livid tumultuous stream, bank full. It gleamed grayly. All round the landscape was black and blurred. The leafless branches of the trees creaked and tossed above.

But she wanted to hear horse's feet. And she had not been there long before she did hear them. Yes, assuredly a horse was on

the road. She threw up her veil and fixed her eyes with burning devouring eagerness on the deep shadow in which the hill turning down to the bridge was impenetrably sealed. The sound came nearer. The rigid wildness of her face relaxed. She was past thinking that this could be any one but Danby riding home. All precautions for concealment had left her. If it were him—as it must be—oh! that she could win one embrace! She would threaten him with her power over her own life to destroy it.

But there were two horsemen, and as they emerged from the trees and drew near she knew that her eyes were fixed upon her husband. They never went beyond him. She was mesmerised, paralysed with amazement and terror.

But only for a moment. She turned, slipped round the corner of the parapet and disappeared.

At the same moment Mr. Severn suddenly

straightened himself in the saddle and peered into the gloom.

'Some one was there! There was a figure!' he exclaimed.

Danby had seen nothing.

Mr. Severn was trembling, and deathly pale, too excited to speak again. He spurred his horse and it plunged forward. He was across the bridge before Danby had realised that it was possible he had thought he had seen his wife. He followed. Mr. Severn threw the reins to him as he got off his horse and rushed to the parapet.

He leant over, looking down.

'Clothilde!' he cried. It was a cry between a shout and a sob. He was convinced that she was crouching in the shadow of the arch on the very edge of the water.

So she was. And she looked up and their eyes met. Heart-broken eyes both! But oh! he would forgive her.

He followed her, stumbling blindly.

But when he got to the bank there was nothing. Yet he would have plunged into the water had not Danby withheld him. Danby was convinced that he was under a delusion, had mistaken a shadow for a figure. They had heard no splash, no cry. Mr. Severn's explanations were incoherent. He could not convince Danby that he had not only seen her, but she him, that she must be in the water since she was not to be seen anywhere else. Danby reasoned with him. He could not believe that Mrs. Severn had had the courage to do this thing. He wanted him to come away. Their horses were grazing by the roadside. He urged that they could soon be home, that he would ride with him. He was alarmed by his look of illness and physical suffering.

But Mr. Severn insisted upon walking along the course of the river. He insisted that it would not be useless to do so. And Danby yielded. He dare not let him go alone.

It was only a few yards farther down that one bank of the stream, suddenly delving in, scooped by the flood, left almost in mid-stream a row of stakes which had once marked its margin. As they drew near it was not difficult to discern a dark shape that slowly swirled within these stakes. The current had borne it straight betwixt two of them. But the current had now left it, and there it floated until suddenly, under their eyes, it sank.

Danby threw off his coat and leapt from the bank. He knew now, one glance acknowledged it to Mr. Severn, that it was Clothilde whom he would find. They had seen her face for one moment before she disappeared —a calm, marble-pale face.

It was three hours later when Danby drove up the park home. Mrs. Severn lay in the lodge-keeper's cottage, and he had driven with Mr. Severn to Old Lafer, and

left him in Anna's loving care. Before he reached the Hall the door was opened, and he saw Cynthia standing on the steps, scarcely within cover, for the rain that was now falling flecked her dress. She looked pale and anxious, lovely too in her gown of yellow silk, lovely and full of life. They looked at each other without speaking, there was a horrified question in her eyes. Rumours had reached her through the servants, but he had sent her a message to assure her of his safety. She waited for confirmation from him. He drew her into the drawing-room, and she saw how deathly pale and haggard he was.

'Oh, Lucius,' she whispered, 'is it true? The servants have been talking. Is it true——?'

'She is dead, my darling wife,' said Danby.

They were silent. He was wholly unstrung, she had heard him sob. And

Cynthia's eyes were full of tears. He took her in his arms. But the moment she raised her head again he smiled at her. He could not have borne to think that this sorrow must be hers too, had it not been that in the hour's bitterness the only shadow on their lives passed away for ever.

THE END

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